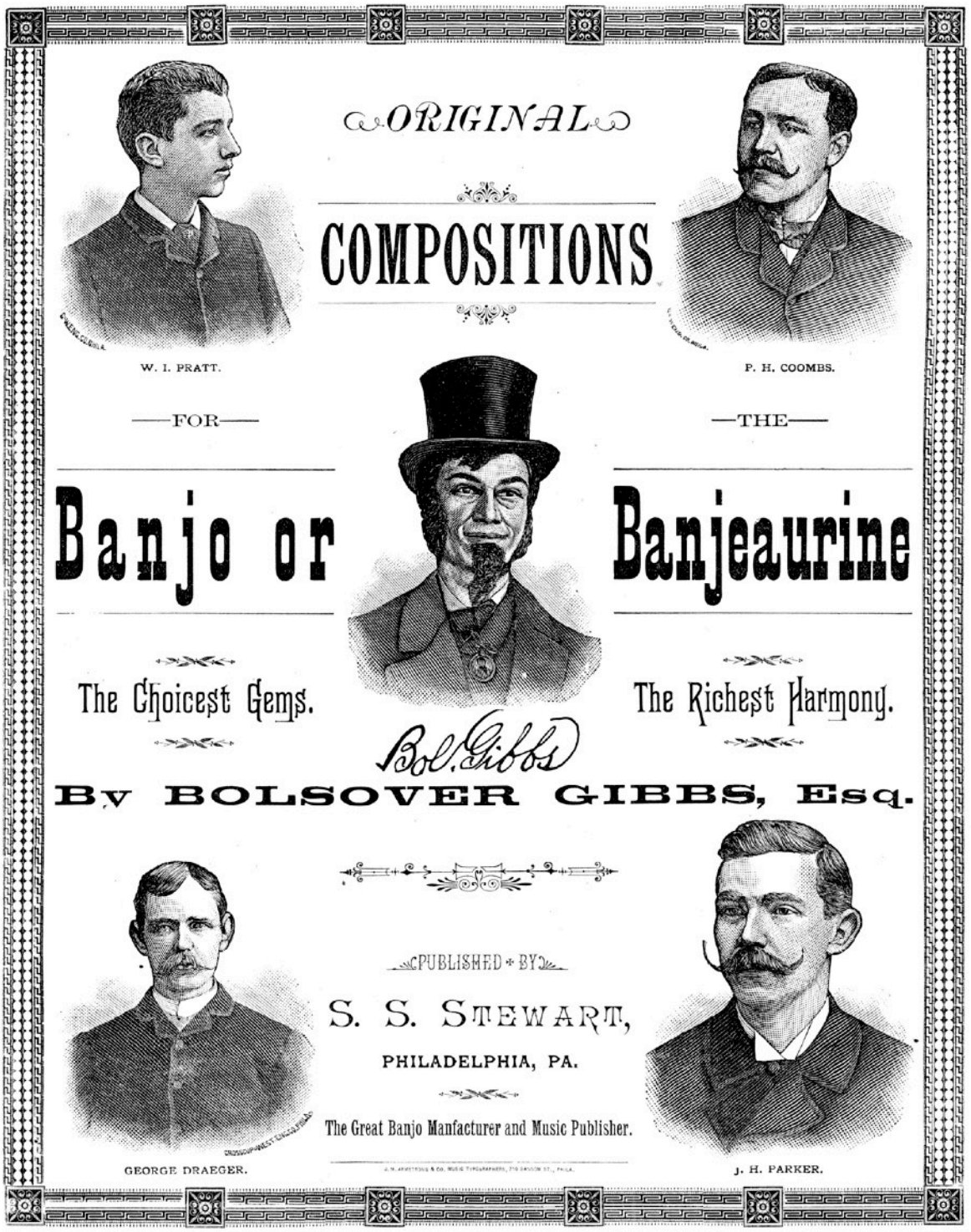
Complete Collected Works

In the Orignial Facsimile A Notation



Compiled by

Joel W. Hooks

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The Complete Collected Works

WITH

Full Life Story

of

BOLSOVER GIBBS

Containing all known pieces by that legendary composer in the original A Notation as well as available C Notation versions.

Assembled for the First Time In One Volume

by

Joel W. Hooks

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THE UNEXPECTED BOLSOVER GIBBS

by Joel Hooks

Of all the contributors to *S. S. Stewart's Banjo and Guitar Journal* (hereafter *SSS Journal*) in the sixteen years of its publication while S. S. Stewart was alive, one man stands out. Bolsover Gibbs was an exceptionally talented composer for the banjo. His "Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone" has stood the test of time and remains a staple of the classic banjo repertoire. His good humor shone when reporting "On The Road," even when plagued by illness and hard times. Though his compositions are still played, his story remains a mystery.

Shortly after the release of his first published number, "The Famous Lost Chord Jig," the man himself was introduced in April of 1886.[1] From that time on, he was a regular contributor who sent in letters about the world of a traveling salesman and banjoist. SSS also published a steady stream of Gibbs' banjo compositions, each one clever and humorous, for a total of 13 numbers, including a full banjo club arrangement of "Hemlock Schottische."

Bolsover "Bol" Gibbs was born August 16th, 1857 in New York City to Comstock Gibbs and Mary Ann Cranberry Gibbs.[2] He was educated in his native city until the age of seventeen; after that, his parents sent him to Europe. He had been studying violin and piano at a conservatory in Paris for two years when he received word of his father's death. On returning to America, he discovered that his father had neglected the family estate and left it in an "embarrassing condition." Gibbs was obliged to abandon his musical pursuits in order to put the family finances back in order.

About 1878, he became enamored with the banjo and devoted himself to mastering the instrument. His banjo playing was described as an "all together different manner from any of the other artists now catering to the public; he has several tricks which he introduces into his act, said by some to be truly marvelous. His manner of playing the tremolo is entirely his own, and will never be successfully copied, because of a very painful accident which necessitated a surgical operation to his right hand, when a young lad, although considered a great misfortune at the time, has now proved of immense benefit, as it has given the afflicted member a sort of triple joint, enabling him to excel all ordinary men in execution of certain passages." Bolsover announced that he was opening a studio at 319 Boulevard Ave., Boston, Mass. and would take on students for banjo, adding that he "desires it understood that he will not teach by the 'simple method,' and only pupils who desire a full musical education need apply." He also announced that "he would arrange music and songs at short notice and at very low prices."[3]

In a startling turn of events, Gibbs changed his plans and "seized with sudden attacks of the travel mania," left all of his business behind in Boston and struck out west for San Francisco. He apologized to people who might have sent him letters as "when I left, I accidently forgot to notify the Post Master where to send my mail, and in fact, had I thought of it, I would not have had the slightest idea where to have it sent . . . Consequently I came to the

conclusion that the easiest way was to let the thing take care of itself."[4] From this point on, he is "on the road" for the rest of his life.

In July of 1886, Gibbs was at Bar Harbor, Maine, fishing. It was during this holiday that he suffered the great loss of his dog Banjonaris.[5]

Traveling to Milwaukee on October 30, 1886, Bolsover Gibbs wrote that he had taken a job "selling plate glass now on a salary and commission, and it keeps me flying." Gibbs also had, after three attempts, managed a visit to the S. S. Stewart banjo factory. Unfortunately, Stewart had left the day before on a trip to Chicago, so they did not get a chance to meet in person. Gibbs spent four days in Philadelphia, visiting the SSS factory and enjoying local restaurants.[6] Three months later, in Utica, NY, he was identifying himself as a salesman and amateur banjoist.[7]

While vacationing at Niagara Falls in 1887, Gibbs wrote to the *Journal* that he became ill with "brain fever" and was taken under the care of his cousin Dr. Commonwealth Jones. It was in this letter that Gibbs first mentions being married, but does not give his wife's name. After six weeks of treatments, he recovered and made plans with his cousin to finance a trip to Europe by having Gibbs' wife sell all of their possessions. Gibbs and Jones then convinced Mrs. Gibbs that she was too weak to survive the trip and left her behind as they took a train to New York to board a steamer for Liverpool. Gibbs returned to the US alone, leaving Jones in London where he had taken a job as the medical adviser for Buffalo Bill's Combination.[8]

Besides the publication of his "Pluto Dance" and "Phantom Reel," there is no mention of him again until April of 1889, when a short article about his compositions in the *Journal* mentions: "England may claim him as a son but to American banjo players he will ever be a brother." The article continues: "His 'Phantom Reel,' published in the late issue of the *Journal*, was so strikingly original and 'catching,' that his name has been given a trysting place in the minds of our readers. But the crowning cap of all is perhaps one of his latest efforts, the duet for two banjos, 'Aunt Susie's Walk-in.' The music is Gibbs-like and soul inspiring. The title page,



Bolsover Gibbs.

designed by the composer himself, is truly an appropriate work of art, and well adapted to the peculiar merits of the composition. In fact, 'Aunt Susie's Walk-in' bids fair rival in popular favor [to] such well known and standard compositions as 'Johnny Get Your Hair Cut,' etc. etc." It was in this same issue that his famous "Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone" was first announced.[9]

Harry L. Keith, banjoist of Chicago, sent in a "crayon portrait" of Bolsover Gibbs for publication in the Journal during the summer of 1889. It was accompanied by the following caption: "While in Chicago recently, Brother Bolsover Gibbs had a crayon portrait made by a brother banjo artist, Harry L. Keith, from which he has kindly permitted us to make a rough sketch. It represents Mr. Gibbs in one of his happiest moods and no doubt will be appreciated by many of our readers. Those who admire—(and there are many)—those choice Gibbserian musical efforts lately produced, such as 'The Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone,' 'Aunt Susie's Walk-in,' 'Phantom March,' &c. will be pleased to have Mr. Gibbs' latest portrait, representing the condition he was in when he transcribed or composed the now famous 'Liquid Inspiration Schottische.'"[10]

In the year 1890, his only contributions to the Journal were two short poems.[11]

Gibbs was not one to refrain from criticism. Evidently disgusted with the current trend of "the delicate fingered banjo picker, fearing to rumple the

serene equanimity of his delicate finger ends," he wrote an editorial for the *Journal* giving his opinions on banjo tone and setup in the fall of 1891.[12]

S. S. Stewart published two more Bolsover Gibbs compositions in 1891, "Hemlock Schottische" and "The Fantastic Fad T'rarum Schottische." Stewart also published an arrangement of "Liquid Inspiration Schottische" for the zither (vol. 8, no. 2 June and July 1891, p. 13).

It is strange that there is no evidence of Bolsover Gibbs contributing to any other banjo publication besides the *SSS Journal* during his entire career. Furthermore, S. S. Stewart was the only publisher who published his music. Any attempts to find him in census logs have been fruitless; genealogical research has found no evidence of his family at all.

Gibbs manages to stay out of the public eye until January of 1893, but on January 14, 1893, S. S. Stewart sponsored The Grand Banjo and Guitar Prize Club Concert and Contest, held at the American Academy of Music in Philadelphia before a sold-out crowd. "Bolsover Gibbs gave some humorous recitations," it was reported in *Music and Drama* (as quoted in the *Journal*). Gibbs also played "World's Fair Medley" with his banjo club, The International Serenaders, conducted by O. H. Albrecht.[13]

As reported in the *Journal*: "The 'International Serenaders' were introduced as a comic feature, to prevent interest in the contest from lagging, on account of the great length of the program. This 'club' got the last prize (a SSS Banjeaurine valued at $30), and that is all the leader aimed for, having kindly volunteered to make a little fun for the audience. Each man in this organization was made up in comic costume, to represent a different nationality. Mr. 'Bolsover Gibbs' who was no less personage than Erastus Osgood, late of Littleton, NH, made a 'huge hit.' His comic imitations were 'immense,' and as a humorist he will come rapidly to the front . . . They all wanted to see 'Bolsover Gibbs,' and they have seen him—especially gotten up for the occasion. Bolsover made a big hit.

"Of course, Bolsover does not really exist, but our humorist, Mr. Erastus Osgood, carried out the little joke to the entire satisfaction of all concerned."[14]

Bolsover Gibbs was Fiction

Part sarcasm and part progressive advertising campaign, Gibbs was a vehicle for many things, and a big part of it was fun. The fictional character was used as filler in the *Journal*, product promotion, and commentary. Some of the music attributed to Gibbs was directly tied to his *Journal* letters using an early cross-marketing technique. In his letter titled "On the Road" he was writing while traveling for his sales job. "On the Road Polka" was published in 1886.

Gibbs sold plate glass for a living. No doubt this was the inspiration for "As Smooth as Glass Schottische" (1887), a piece that had "been the means of endearing him to the hearts of ardent lovers of the banjo in America." What stands out in the music is the humor written into the actual notes. In addition to the knowing, sarcastic titles, the music itself contains funny phrases or unexpected diminished chords.

Right out of the gate with the earliest "Gibbs" composition, "The Famous Lost Chord Jig" (1885), a shot is taken at popular culture. The title was an obvious parody of the immensely popular "The Lost Chord," Arthur Sullivan's musical version of the poem "A Lost Chord" by Adelaide Anne Procter. The entire banjo part is monophonic. The most transparent mockery was "The Fantastic Fad T'rarum Schottische" (1891)—a reference to the ever-present Wardian Cases (fancy terrariums) found in the parlors of the late nineteenth century. The regular topic in the *Journal* of alcoholism among professional banjoists was addressed with "Liquid Inspiration Schottische" (1886), where hiccups were written into the music with grace notes.

Gibbs claimed inspiration for "Phantom Reel" (1889; also released as "The March of the Phantoms" with piano accompaniment the same year) came from hallucinations induced by the use of "anesthetics" for treating a toothache. Bolsover even illustrated his visions on the cover of the sheet music. "Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone" (1889) was anything but funereal; this piece was a "humorous musical descriptive farewell to the old dead jaw."[15] In the April and May 1889 issue of the *Journal*, we read: "Bolsover Gibbs, it is said, is capable of manipulating the twelve semitones of the musical scale with as much humor, as Mark Twain of



ERASTUS OSGOOD

humorising the English language. Bolsover has now set forth his latest effort in the shape of 'Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone.' To the modern banjo student this title may sound ridiculous. But why should it sound more ridiculous than the 'Funeral March of a Marionette.'"[16]

"Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone" contains an oddly repeating strain as if the needle is skipping on a record. This is in keeping with a character trait explained by Gibbs: "Now Stewart, you know I am frequently taken with absent-minded fits; sometimes to such an extent as to render me supremely ridiculous to those who do not know that I have got off on one of my musical reveries."[17]

After the stage appearance of Bolsover Gibbs by Osgood, the next mention comes in a letter by "Commonwealth Jones" where he is referred to as "the late Bolsover Gibbs."[18] There was no other mention of the character's death nor an obituary; he was merely killed off. In a letter from Jones published in 1895, he mentions attending Gibbs' "imposing and expensive funeral . . . about eighteen months ago in Philadelphia."[19] That would put the death of the character around January of 1894.

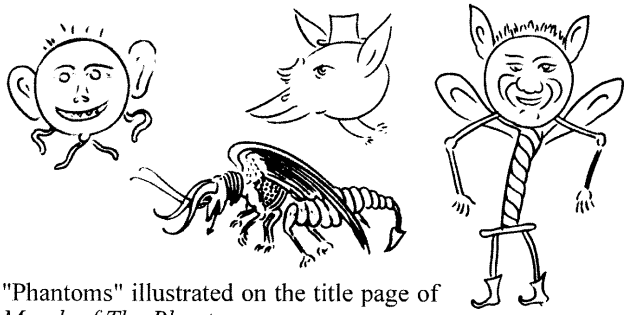
While Erastus Osgood played Gibbs on stage, there is no evidence that he had anything to do with either the creation of the character or authorship of the letters and music. His association with Stewart did not become personal until 1892, when he announced his intention to perform at the concert. He also traveled that same year to Philadelphia to study banjo with Thomas Armstrong.[20] Osgood was much too late to have had early creative input.

The best guess for the birth of Bolsover Gibbs is that he came from the mind of Samuel Swaim Stewart himself. The character's sarcasm and satire are consistent with Stewart's sense of humor in print. Stewart had first used the character Jacob Coombs, the main subject in his work of fiction "Adventures of a Banjo Player" (1884), in the *Journal* as submitting commentary before he wrote the book. Stewart had a history of using fictional characters for satire.

The music credited to Gibbs likely came from various composers, Stewart included. The coversheet used on many of Gibbs' pieces shows a portrait of Gibbs surrounded by a number of banjoists. This could have been a way to say that these composers were contributors to the character's music. Woodcuts of the banjoists on the cover include W. L. Pratt, P. H. Coombs, George Draeger, and J. H. Parker.

Only one of the pieces has any credit besides "Bolsover Gibbs." "The Famous Lost Chord Jig" lists Thomas J. Armstrong as arranger (Armstrong was not included on the title pages mentioned above). It is known that composers of banjo music at this time would use noms de plume so that the same names did not constantly reappear in the periodicals. It could be that Armstrong created the name and Stewart created the character.

This sort of humor shows that Stewart and his contemporaries were having fun. In modern histories such as Karen Lynn's *Half Barbaric Twang*, Stewart is painted as all business with no sense of humor. A study of his work tells a different story. Bolsover Gibbs was the product of a young and successful professional with a creative mind, who was enjoying what he did.



"Phantoms" illustrated on the title page of *March of The Phantoms.*

1. *SSS Journal,* vol. 3, no. 9, April and May 1886, p. 13.
2. "Commonwealth Jones Confines Himself to Solid Facts and Family History," *SSS Journal,* vol. 12, no. 6, February and March 1896, p. 27.
3. Many details of Gibbs' early life and career are from *SSS Journal,* vol. 3, no. 9, April and May 1886, p. 13.
4. Bolsover Gibbs' Letter, Humburg, Arizona, April 16th, 1886, *SSS Journal,* vol. 3, no. 10, June and July 1886, pages 6 & 7.
5. "Interesting Letter From Bolsover Gibbs," *SSS Journal,* vol. 3, no. 11, August and September 1886, p. 6.
6. Bolsover Gibbs' Letter "On the Road," *SSS Journal,* vol. 4, no. 1, December 1886 and January 1887, p. 2.
7. Bolsover Gibbs' Letter, Utica, NY, January 1, 1887, *SSS Journal,* vol. 4, no. 2, February and March 1887, p. 3
8. "Bolsover Gets Sick, Niagara Falls, Dec. 30, 1887," *SSS Journal,* vol. 4, no. 8, February and March 1888, pages 13 & 15.
9. *SSS Journal,* vol. 6, no. 1, April and May 1889, pages 1 & 2.
10. *SSS Journal,* vol. 6, no. 3, August and September 1889, p. 1.
11. "Banjo World," *SSS Journal,* vol. 7, no. 4, October and November 1890, p. 4, and "The Banjo and The 'Fad,'" *SSS Journal,* vol. 7, no. 6, February and March 1891, p. 1.
12. "Bolsover Gibbs on the Banjo," *SSS Journal,* vol. 8, no. 4 October and November 1891, p. 2.
13. *SSS Journal,* vol. 9, no. 6, February and March 1893. Pages 3–5.
14. Ibid.
15. "Too Classical For Him," *SSS Journal,* vol. 11, no. 3, August and September 1894, p. 9.
16. *SSS Journal,* vol. 6, no. 1, April and May 1889, pages 1 –2.
17. "Interesting Letter From Bolsover Gibbs, Bar Harbor, Maine, July 1886," *SSS Journal,* vol. 3, no. 10, p. 6.
18. "Tariff and Tacks," *SSS Journal*, vol. 11, no. 4, October and November 1894, p. 5.
19. "Mystery Revealed," *SSS Journal*, vol. 12, no. 4, October and November 1895, p. 3.
20. "Banjo World," *SSS Journal,* vol. 9, no. 5 pages 7 & 11.

Complete Works of Bolsover Gibbs

1. #189 The Famous Lost Chord Jig, banjo and piano, 1885; arranged by Thomas Armstrong.
2. #207 On The Road Polka, 1886.
3. #208 Liquid Inspiration Schottische, 1886.
4. #211 Sweet as a Peach Polka, 1886.
5. #284 Mystic River Guide Waltz, 1886.
6. #284 As Smooth As Glass Schottische, 1887.
7. #368 Aunt Susie's Walk-in, 1889.
8. #369 Little Daisy Mazurka, 1889.
9. #372 Funeral March of an Old Jaw Bone, 1889.
10. #378 Pluto Dance, 1888/1889. *SSS Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, June and July 1888, p. 5.
11. #404 The March of the Phantoms, 1889. Also published as Phantom Reel in the *SSS Journal* vol. 5, no. 6, February and March 1889, p. 10.
12. #543 The Fantastic Fad T'rarum Schottische, *SSS Journal*, vol. 8, no. 2, June and July 1891, p. 16.
13. #544 Hemlock Schottische,1891. SSS Journal, vol. 8, no. 3 Aug. and Sept. 1891, p. 7. Also published for banjo club as #562 in 1892.

Music Named But Never Published

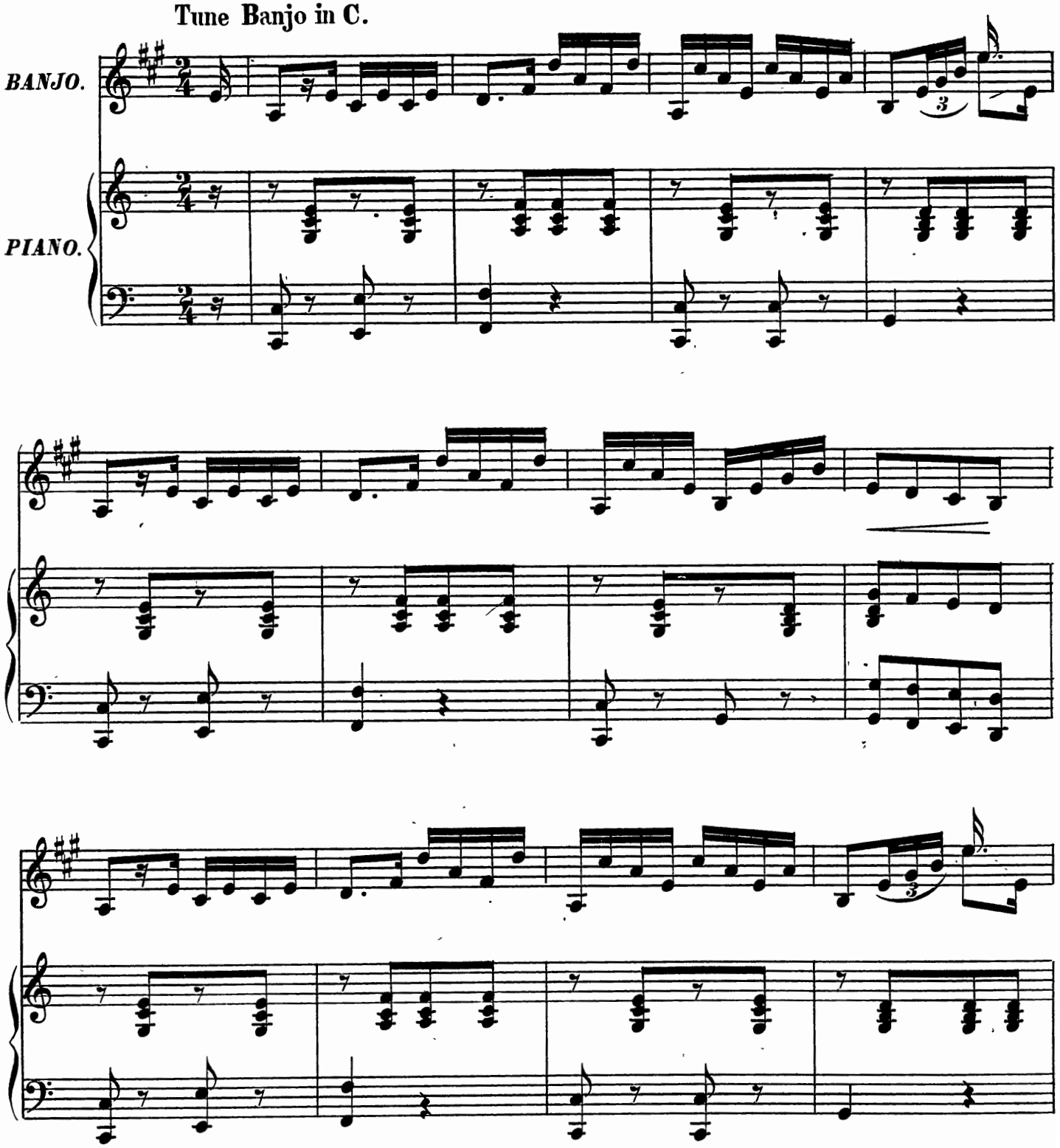
The Maiden's Blush Waltzes.
Plant a Sunflower on the Grave of Old Dog Sport, Ballad.
Never Monkey With Your Papa's Razor, Topical Song.
Angels Watching on de Golden Sho, Negro Hymn.
Prognostication Jig.

THE FAMOUS LOST CHORD JIG.
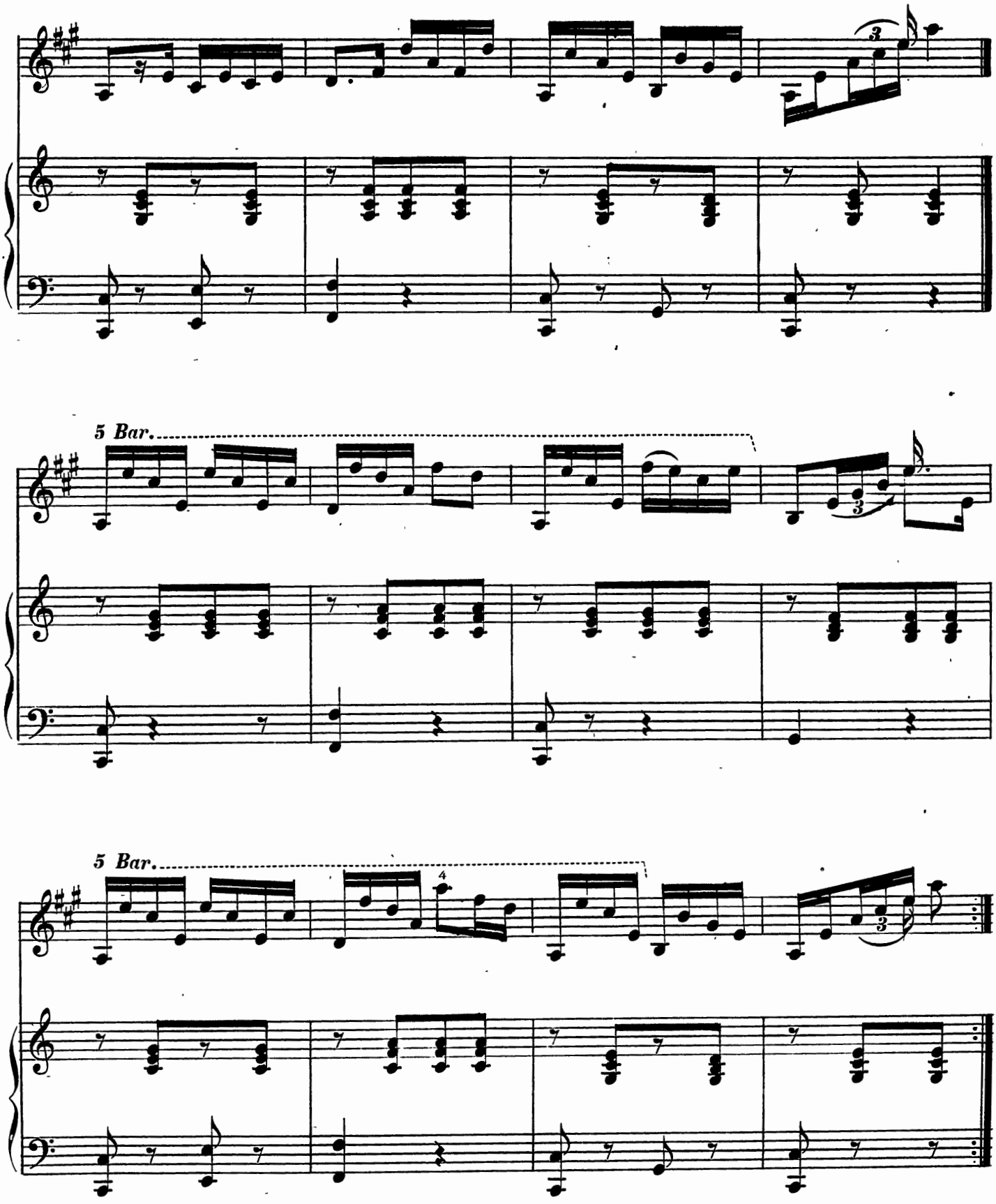
For the Banjo and Piano.

Arr. by THOS. J. ARMSTRONG. *Composed by BOLSOVER GIBBS.*

Tune Banjo in C.



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5 Bar.
5 Bar.



PHILADELPHIA, June 19, 1884.

S. S. STEWART.

DEAR SIR:—The Banjo you made for me last August is giving great satisfaction. It is a perfect instrument, and its beautiful finish and wonderful tone is admired by all who hear it; in fact the same thing can be said of all the Stewart Banjos which have come under my notice.

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THOS. J. ARMSTRONG,

Teacher of the Banjo and Xylophone.



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BRIDESMAID'S CHORUS, (Banjo & Piano)	50
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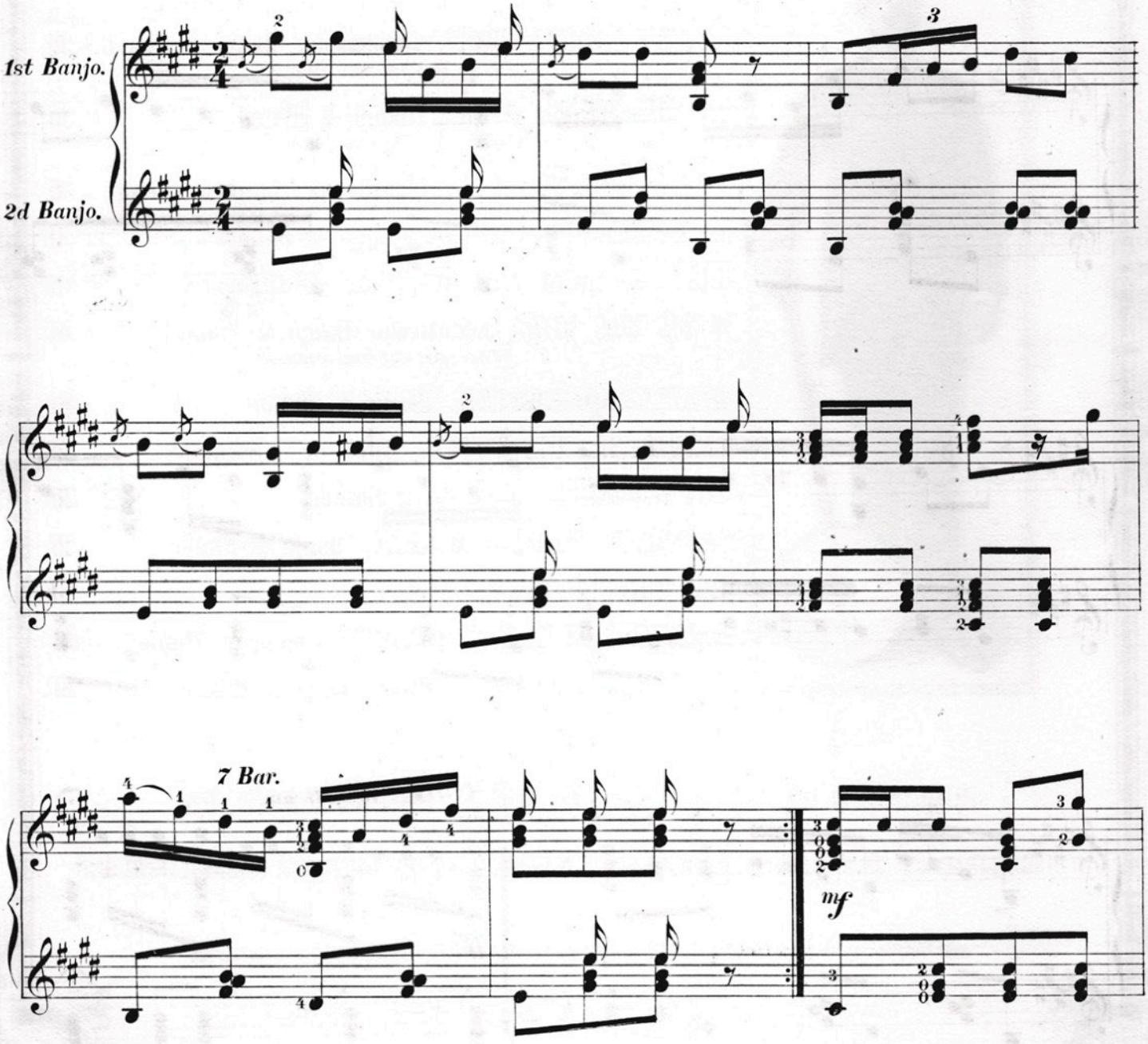
☞Publisher of the BANJO AND GUITAR JOURNAL, a Musical Periodical.☜

"ON THE ROAD"
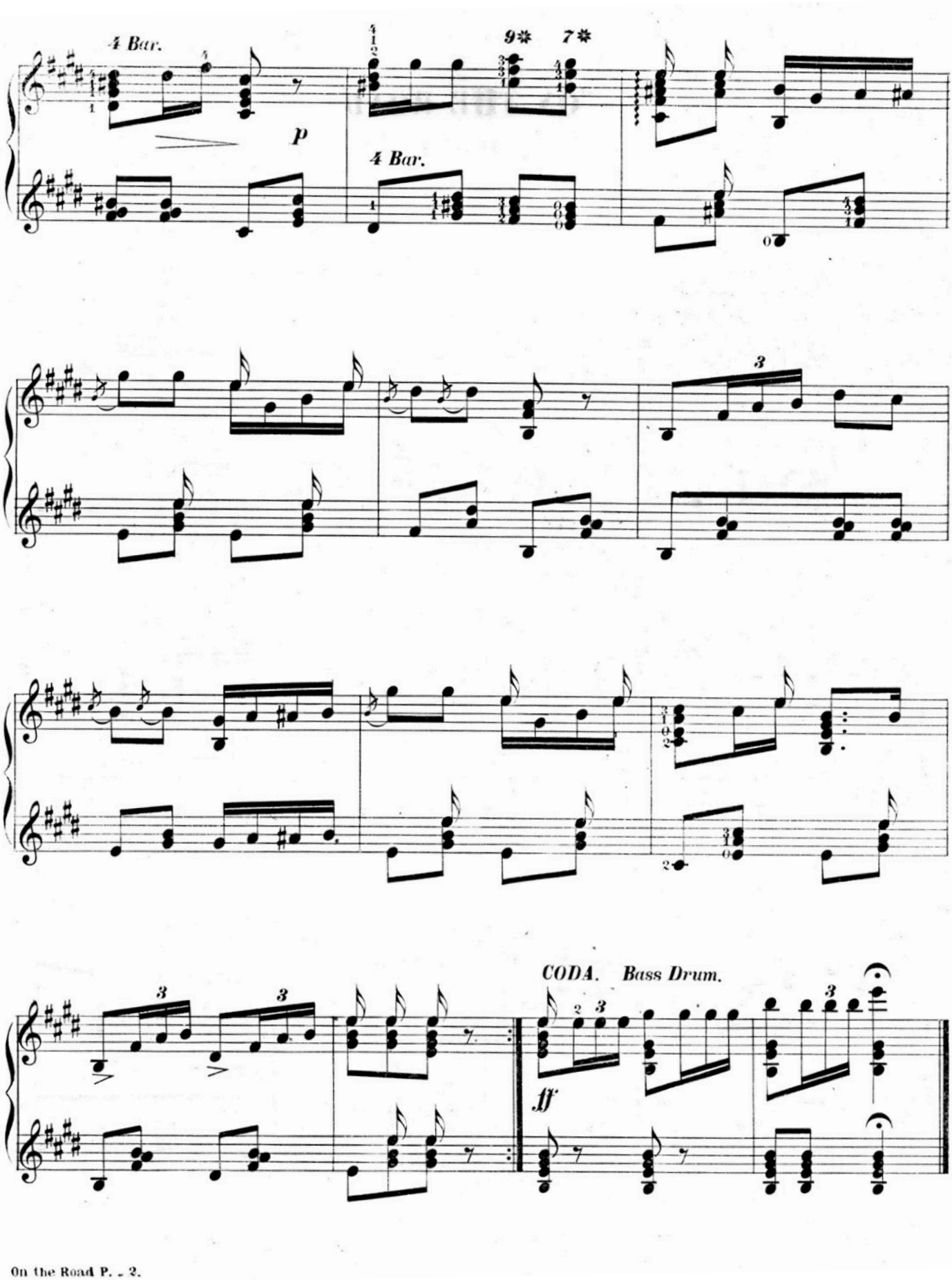
Polka.

For the Banjo and Piano by BOLSOVER GIBBS.

Tune Bass to B.



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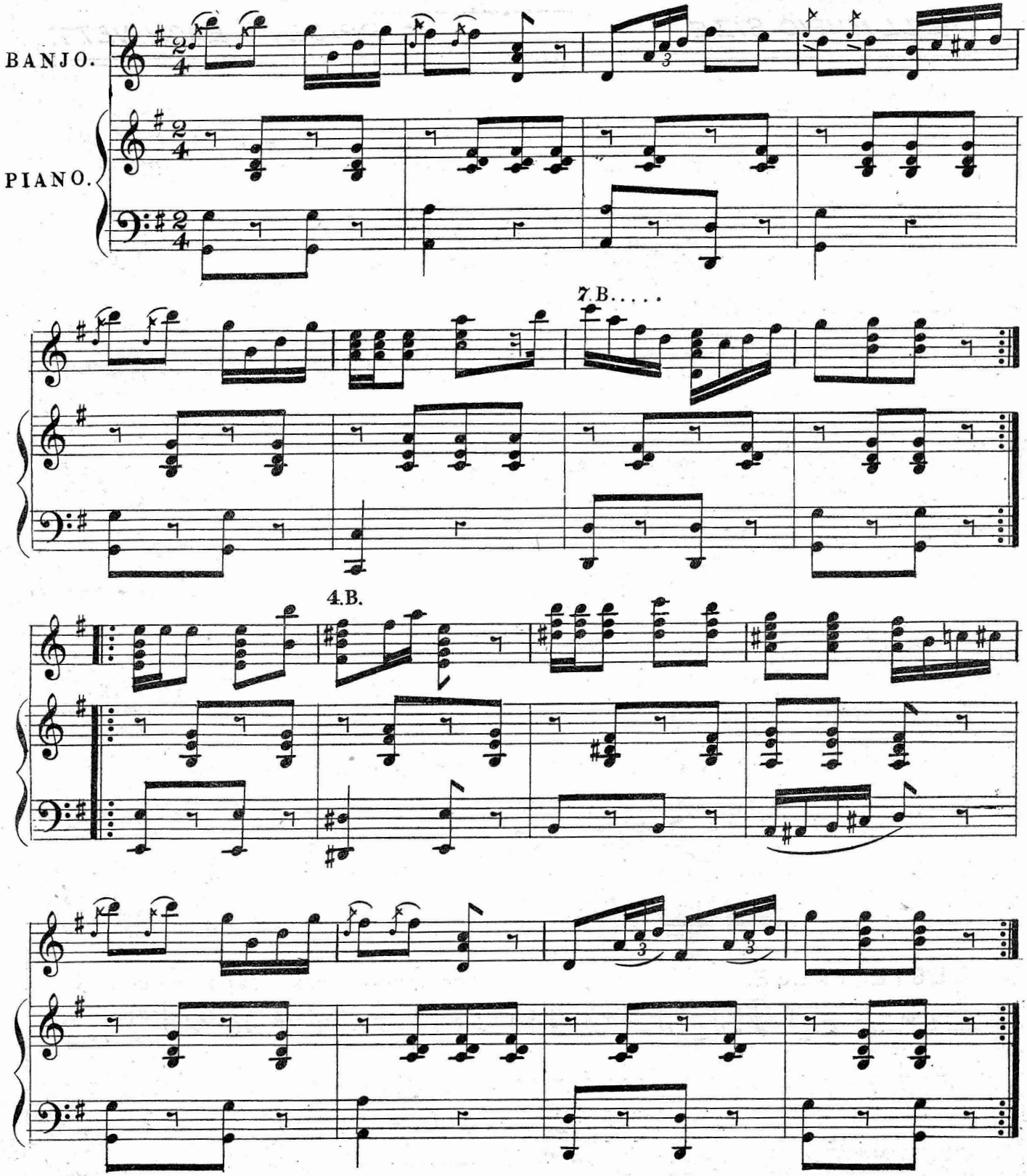

4 Bar.
9*
7*
p
4 Bar.
CODA. Bass Drum.
ff

ON THE ROAD.

POLKA.

Tune 4th String to D.

BOLSOVER GIBBS.



Ellis' Banjo Album No. 6.
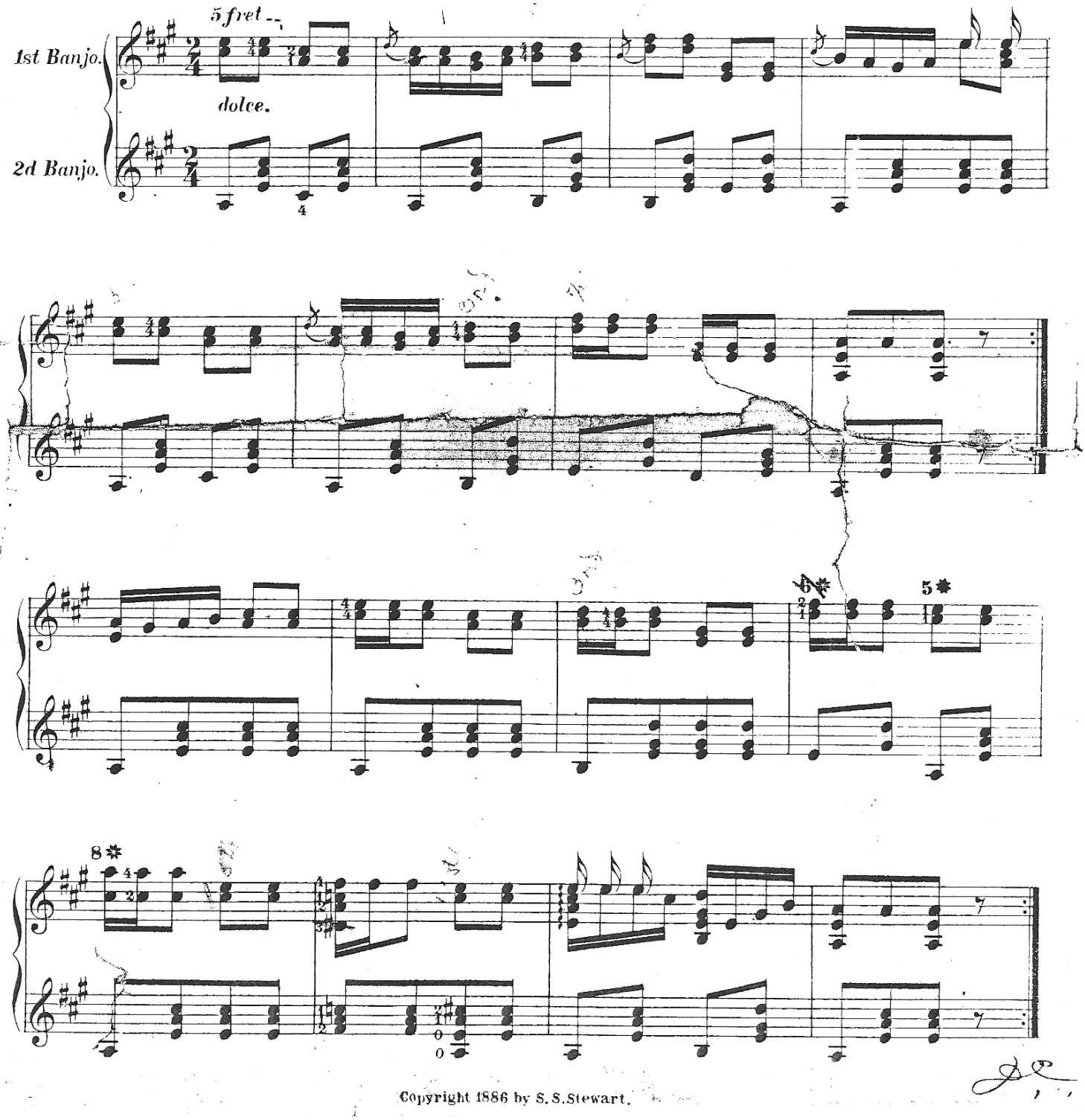


S. S. STEWART

"LIQUID INSPIRATION"

Schottische.

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.
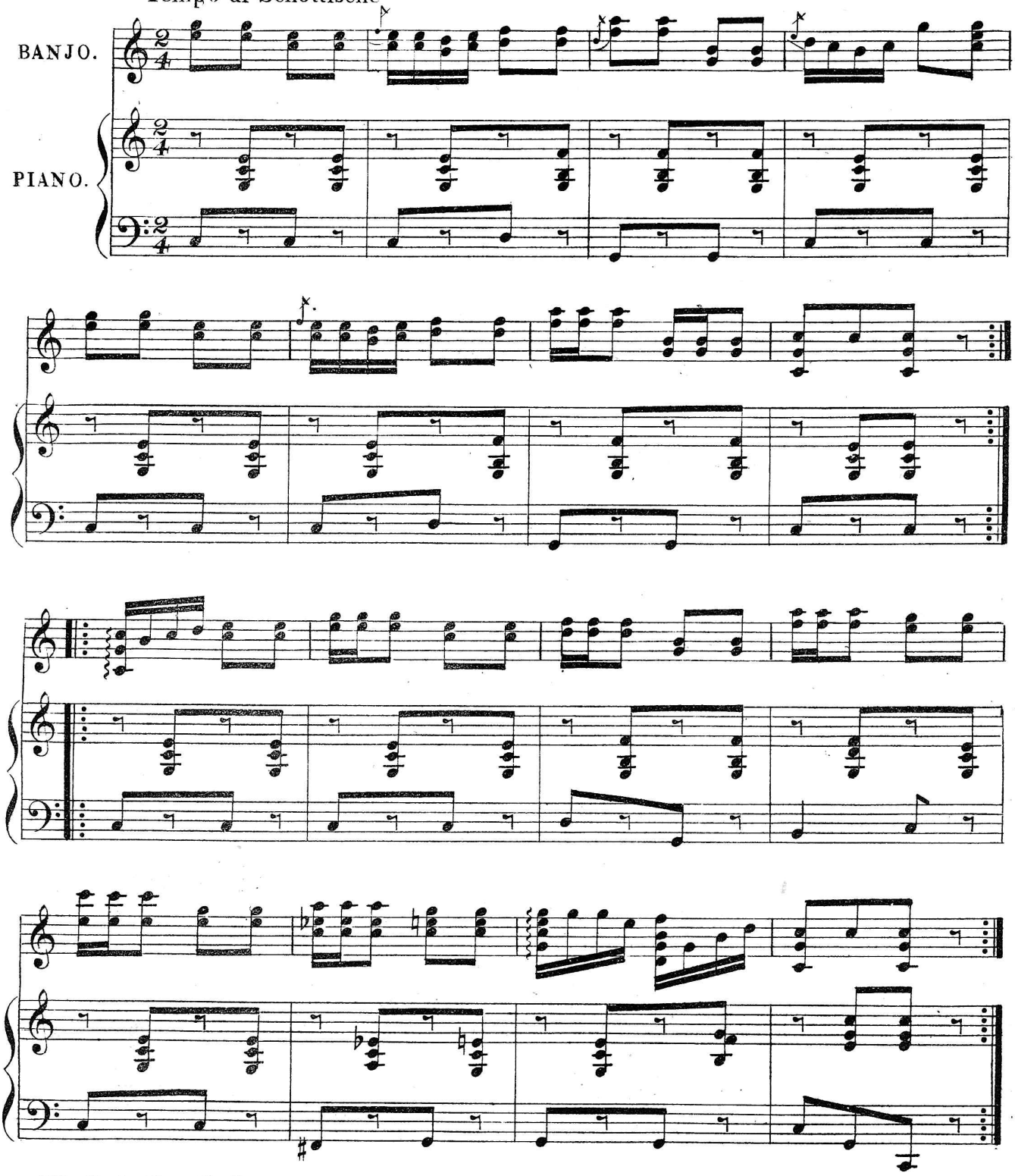


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"A M Y."

SCHOTTISCHE.

Tempo di Schottische
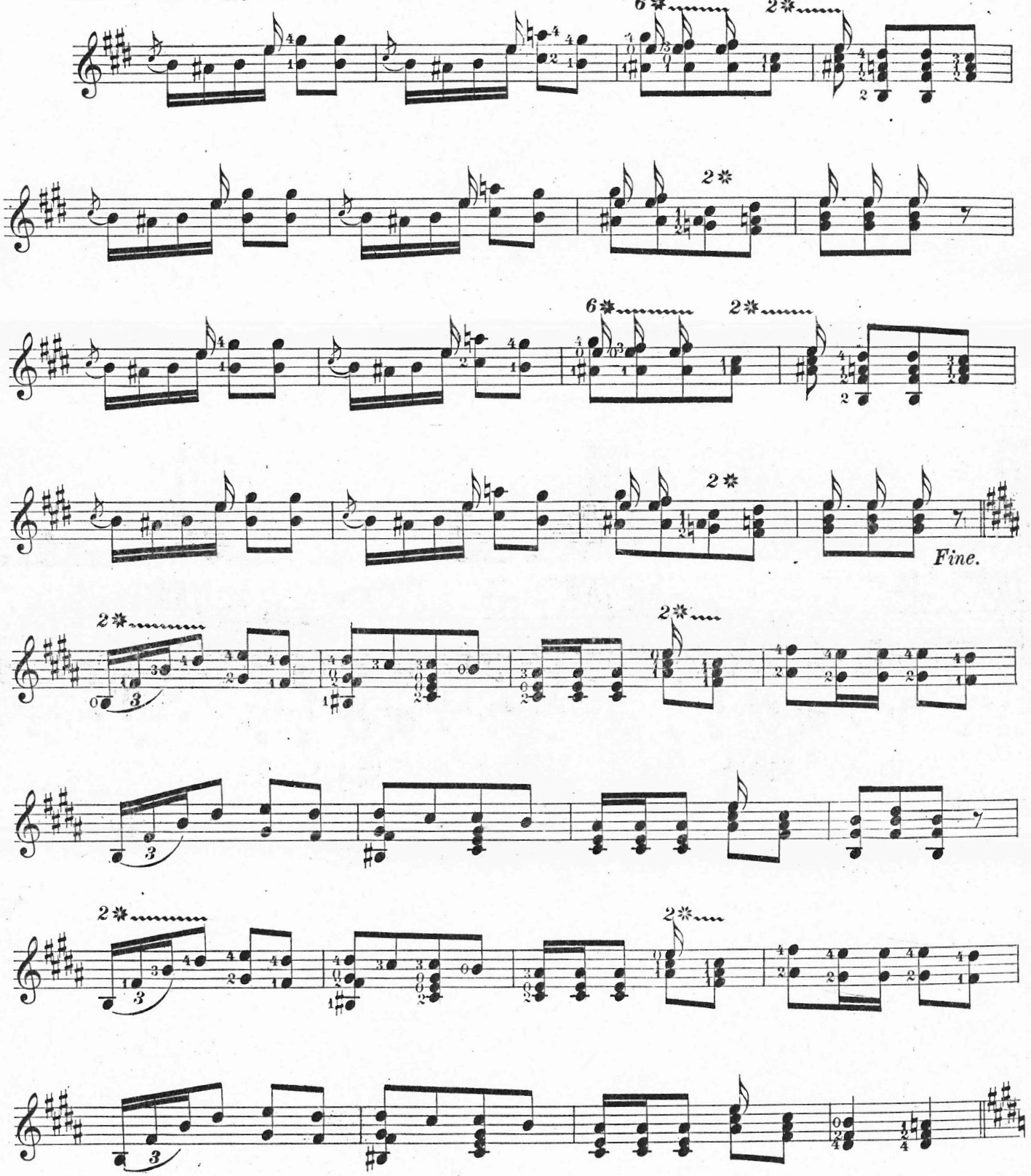


Ellis' Banjo Album No. 6.
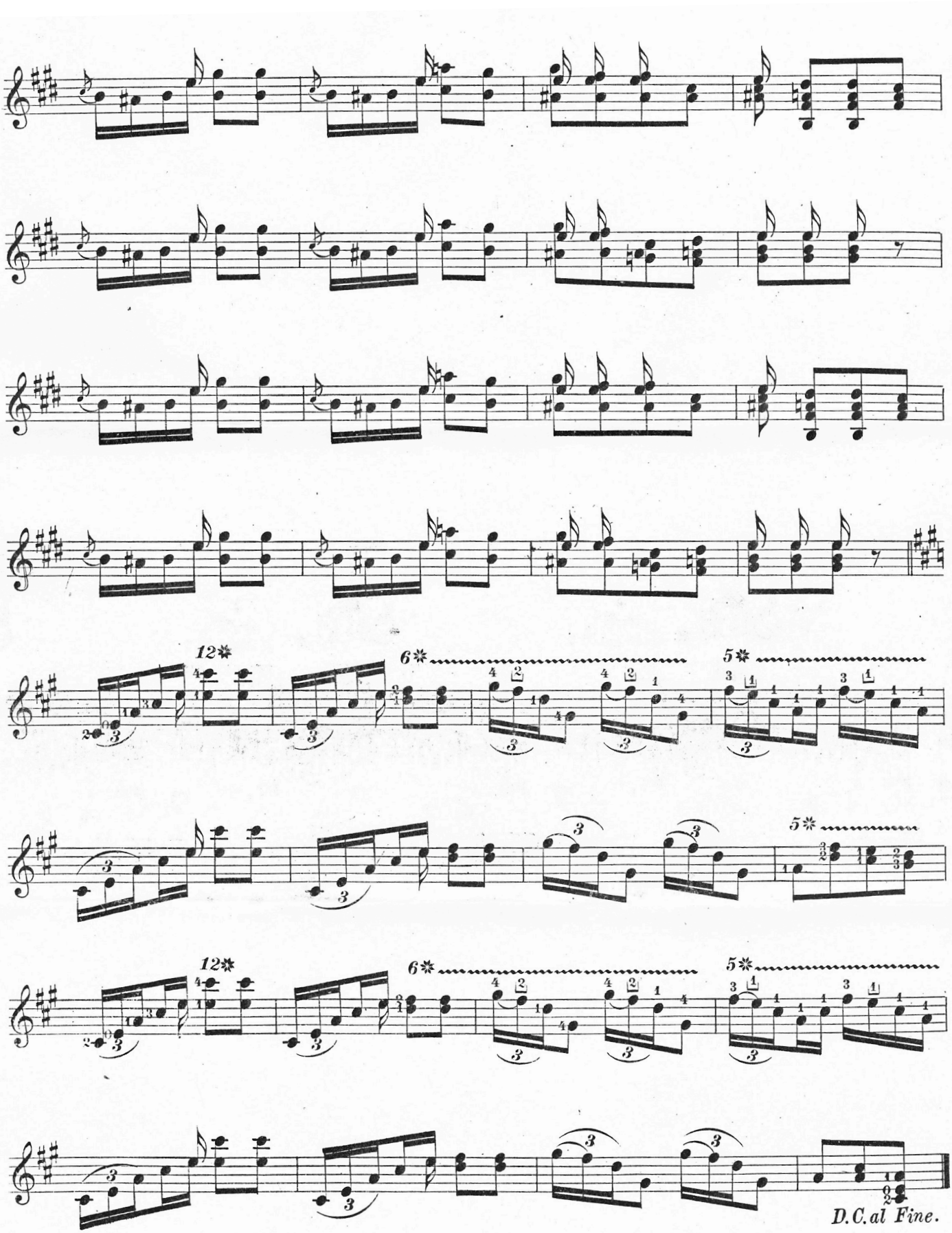
SWEET AS A PEACH.
Polka.

Composed for the Banjo by *BOLSOVER GIBB*

Tune Bass to B.



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Sweet As A Peach - 2.
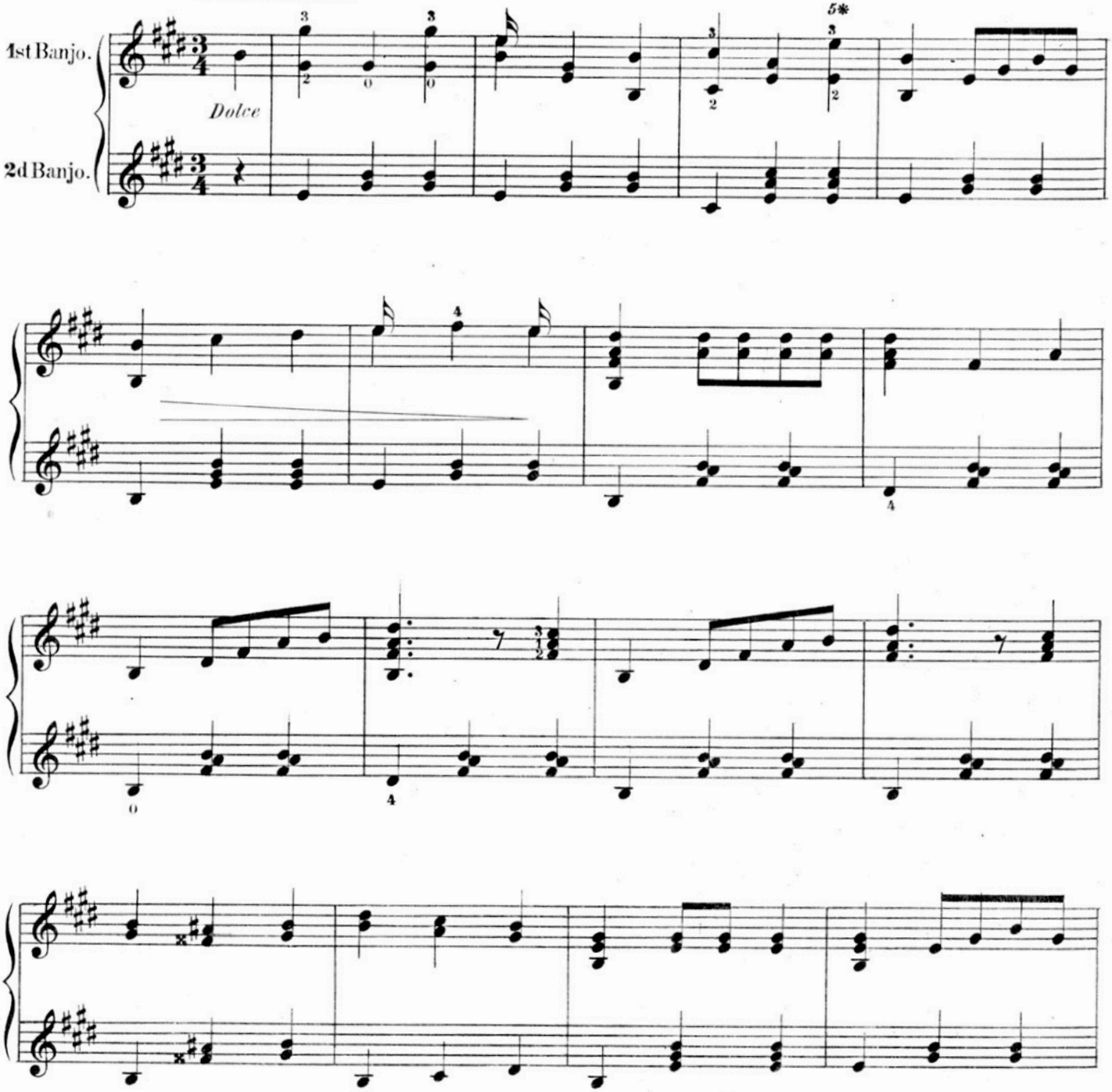
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By BOL. GIBBS.
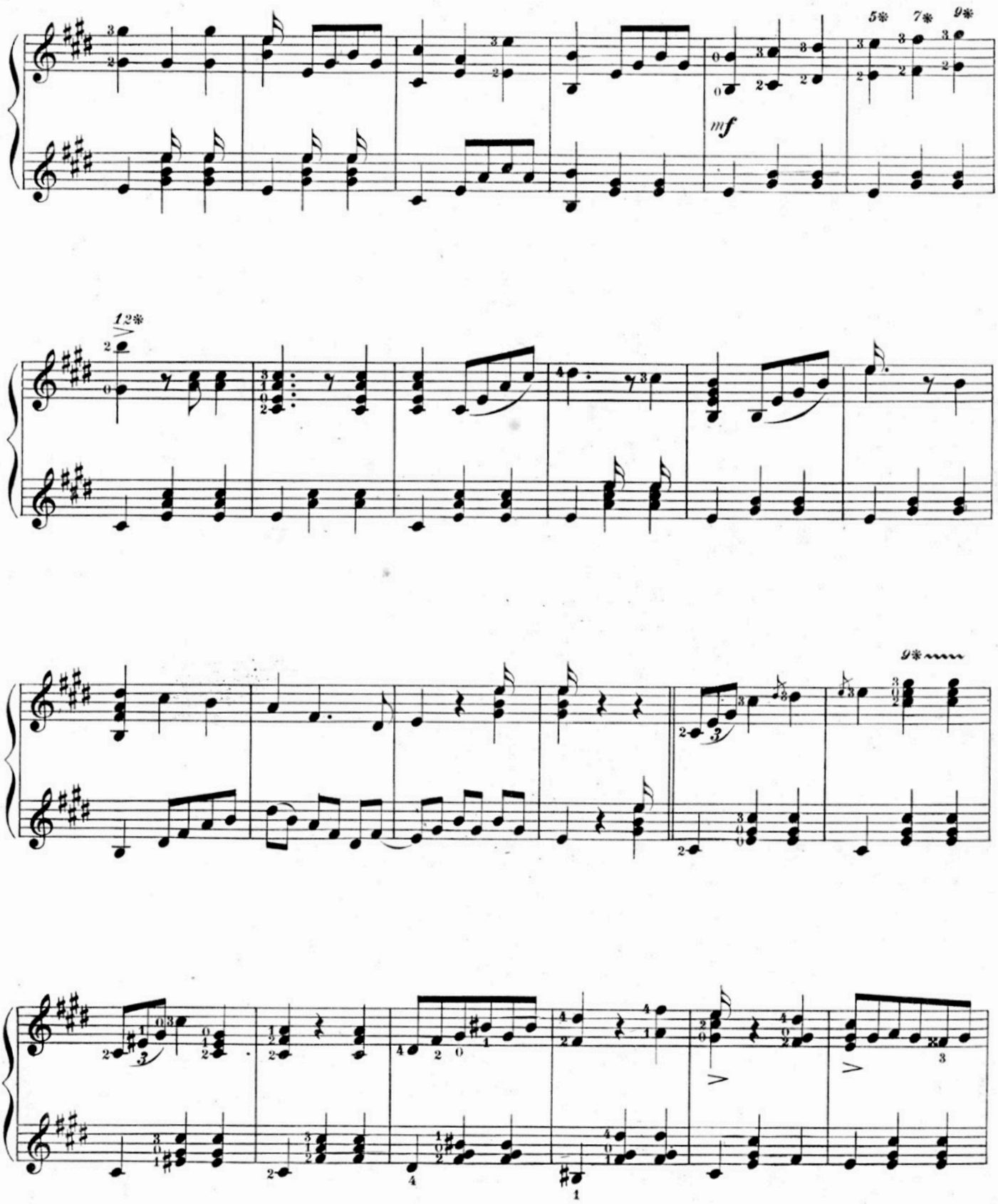
Both Banjos
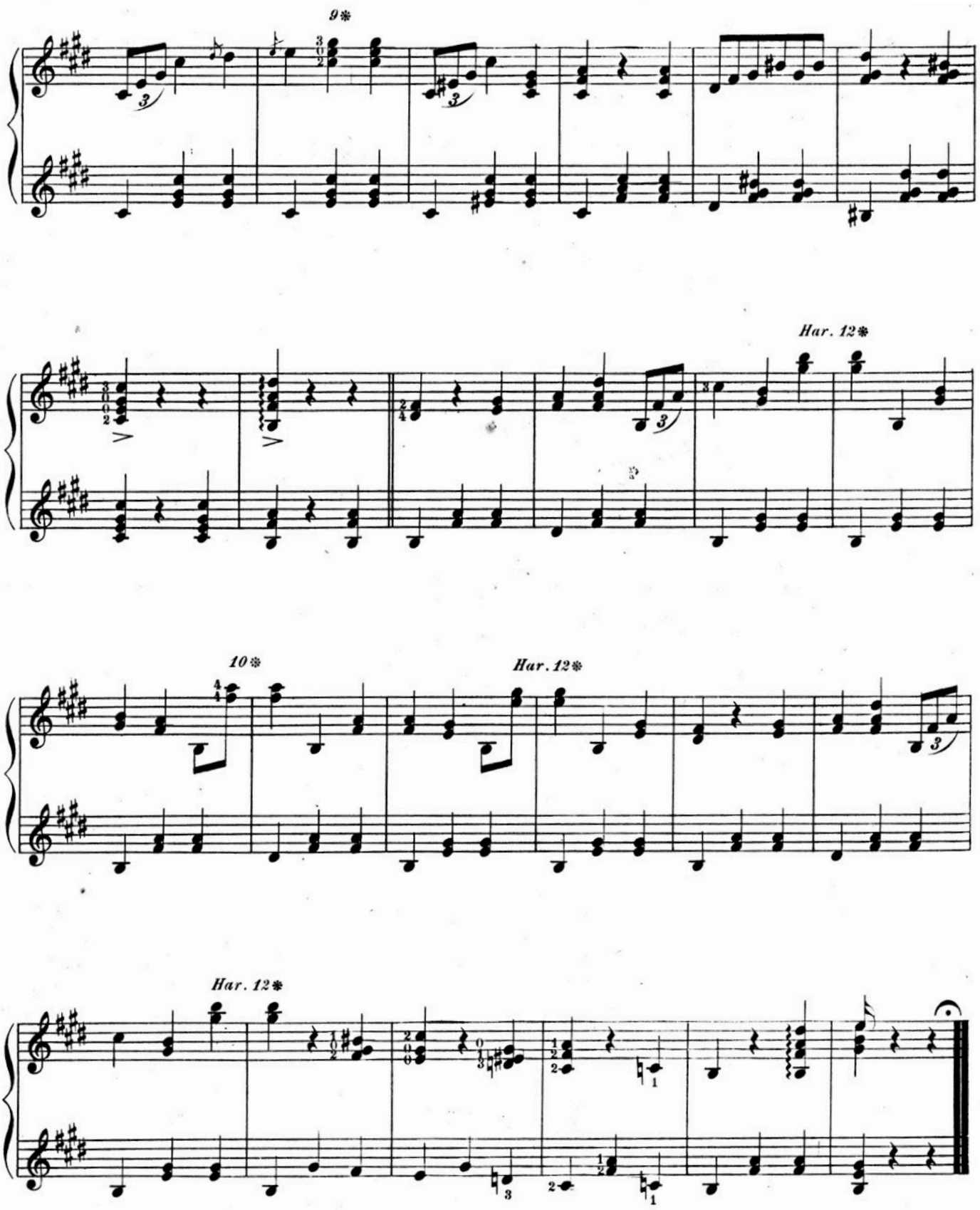
Tune Bass to B.

Originally composed for the Banjeaurine.



Copyright, 1886, by S.S.Stewart.


5*
7*
9*
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12*
9*
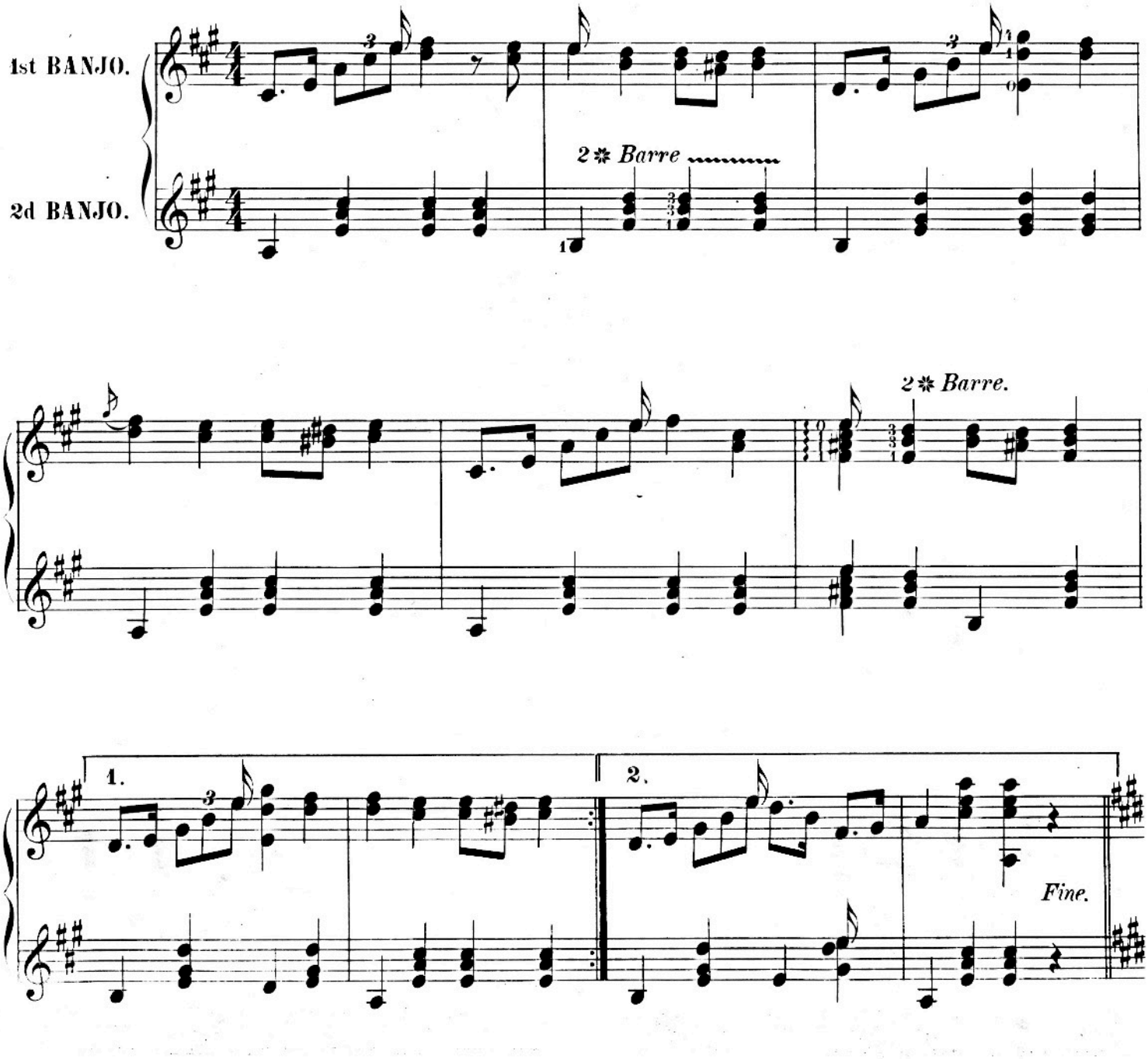

9*
Har. 12*
10*
Har. 12*
Har. 12*


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HOBART
HOBART
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95
MR S.S. STEWART
35615
221 & 223
Church St
PHILADELPHIA
U.S.A
COME HERE I WANT YER
"SIMPLE-METHOD"
BE CAREFUL WHOSE BANJO'S YOU USE
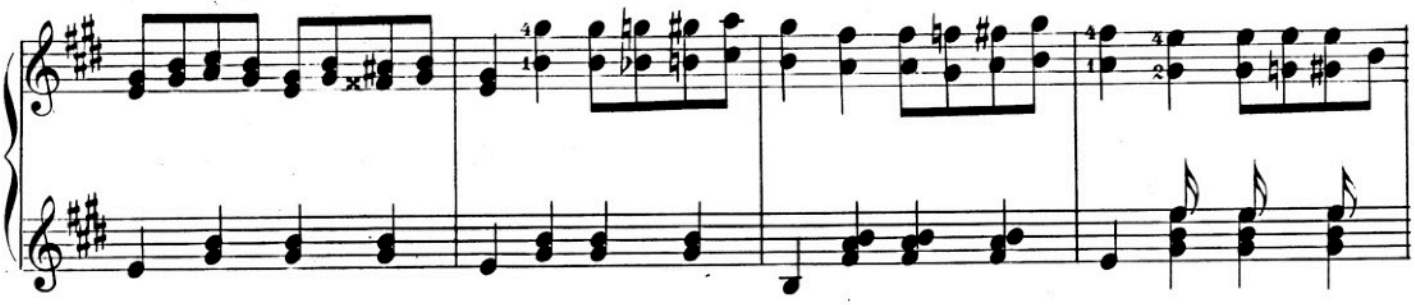
"AS SMOOTH AS GLASS" SCHOTTISCHE.
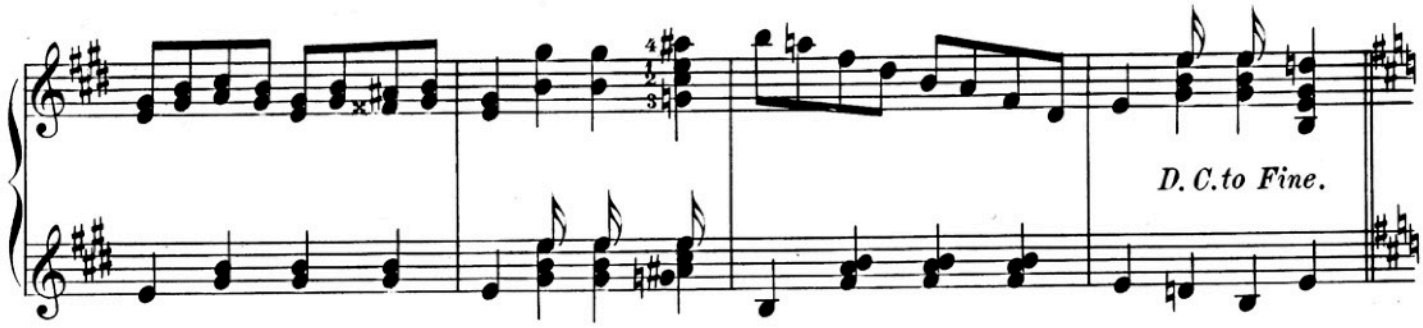
For Two Banjos.
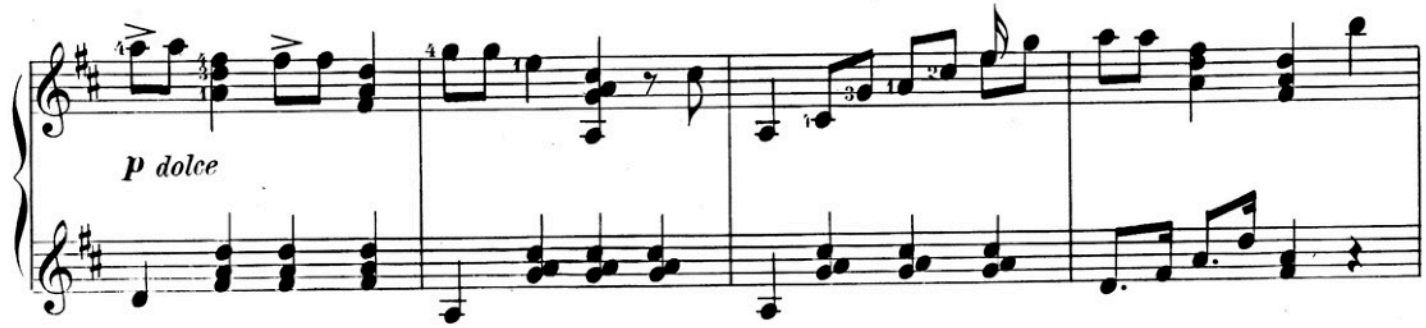
By B. GIBBS.
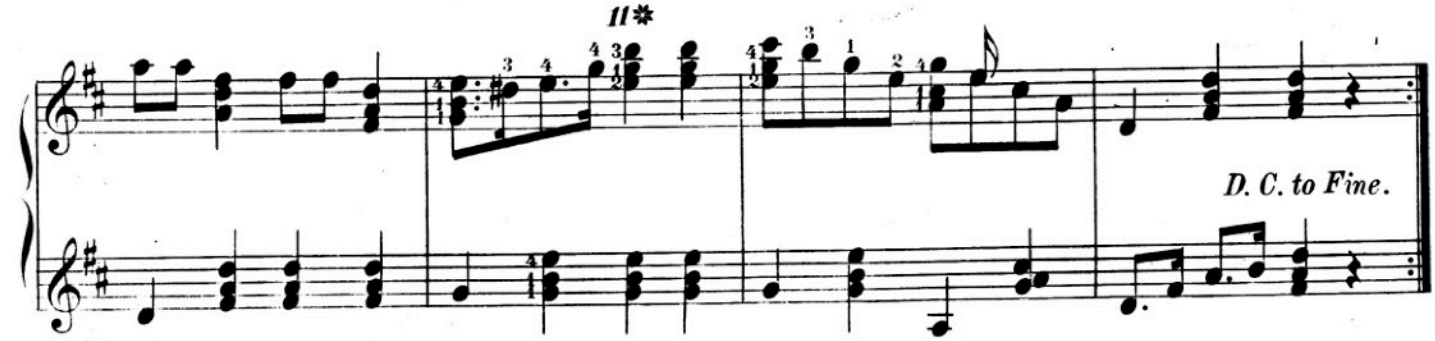


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As smooth as glass - 3.

STEWART'S ORCHESTRA

BANJO.



Size 12 or 13 inch Rim, with any length of neck desired by customers. If no length is mentioned in order, they will be furnished with 19 inch neck. Long necks are only suited to experienced players, or for stroke playing.

No. 1.

Fine German silver rim, with maple rim inside, wire edges, Stewart's imp'vd heavy turned edge nickel-plated hoop (the best hoop in existence), neck made of fine well-seasoned wood with ebony face, white fancy pegs and tail piece, 30 nickel-plated brackets, etc., pearl position marks, etc. Price, **$35.00**

No. 2. The same only that neck is constructed with several veneers, having double the strength and finer appearance than No. 1, and will withstand climatic changes. Price, **$40.00**

Other numbers with carved necks, pearl inlaid work, gold and silver plating, and fancy carved ivory trimmings made at short notice at prices from

$60.00 to $100.00 or higher.

THE BANJO HIT OF 89

Aunt Susie's WALK IN

BREAK DOWN

FOR Two Banjos



BY

BOLSOVER GIBBS.

PRICE 25¢

PHILADELPHIA, PENN.
PUBLISHED BY S.S.STEWART.
The Great Banjo Manufacturer.

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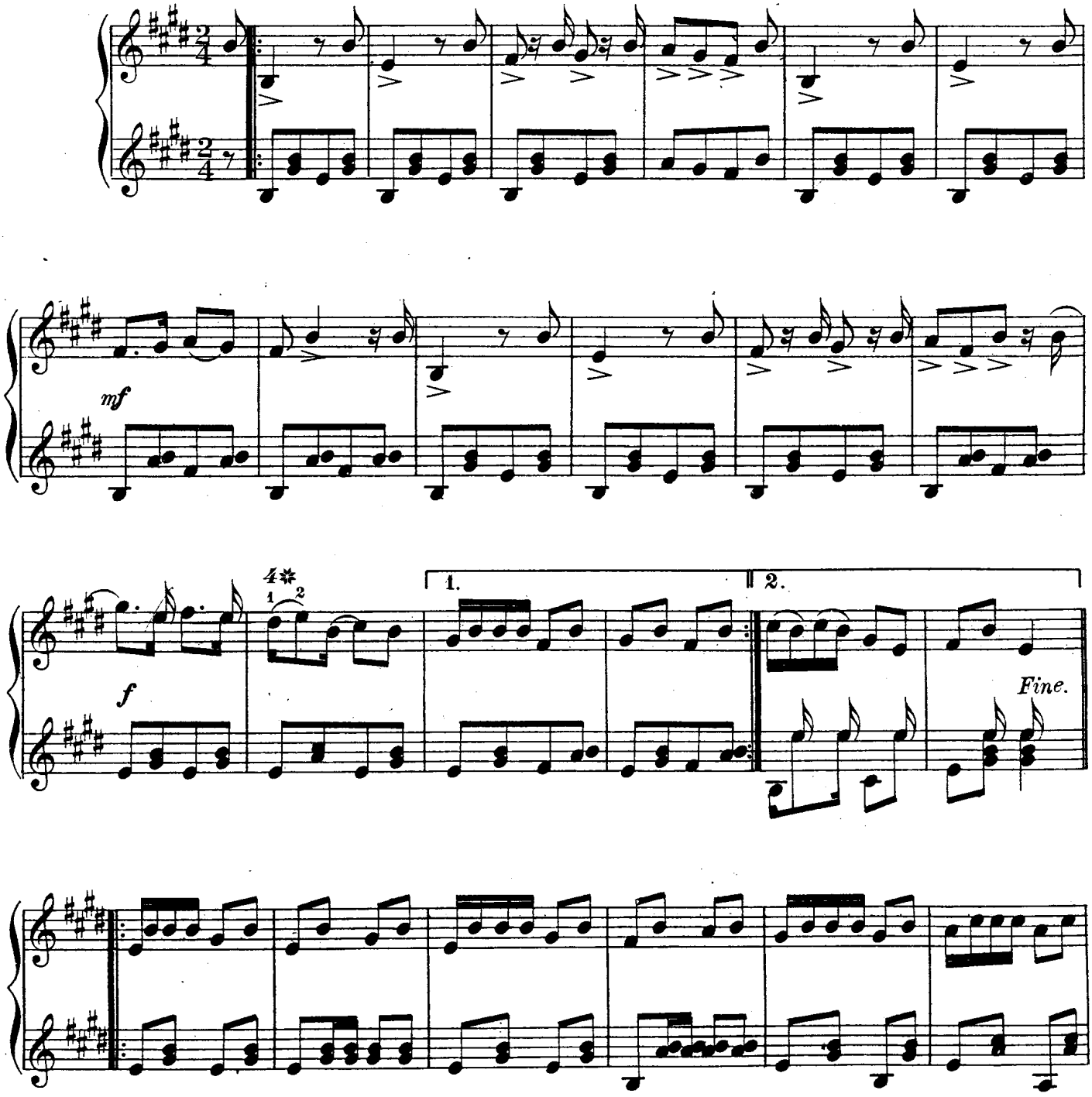
Published by STEWART & BAUER,
1016 CHESTNUT STREET,

AUNT SUSIE'S WALK IN.
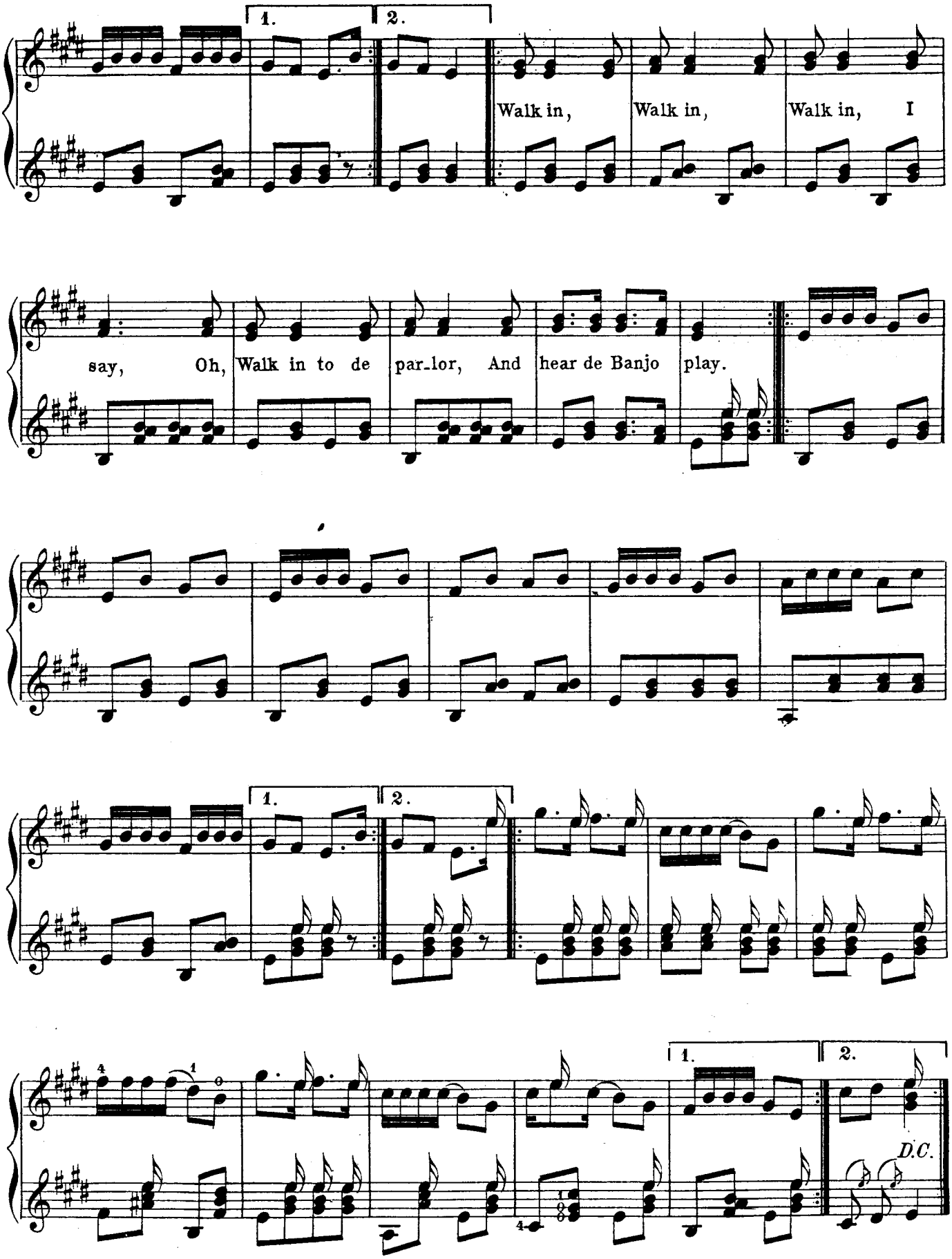
Banjo Duett.

No. 368.

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.



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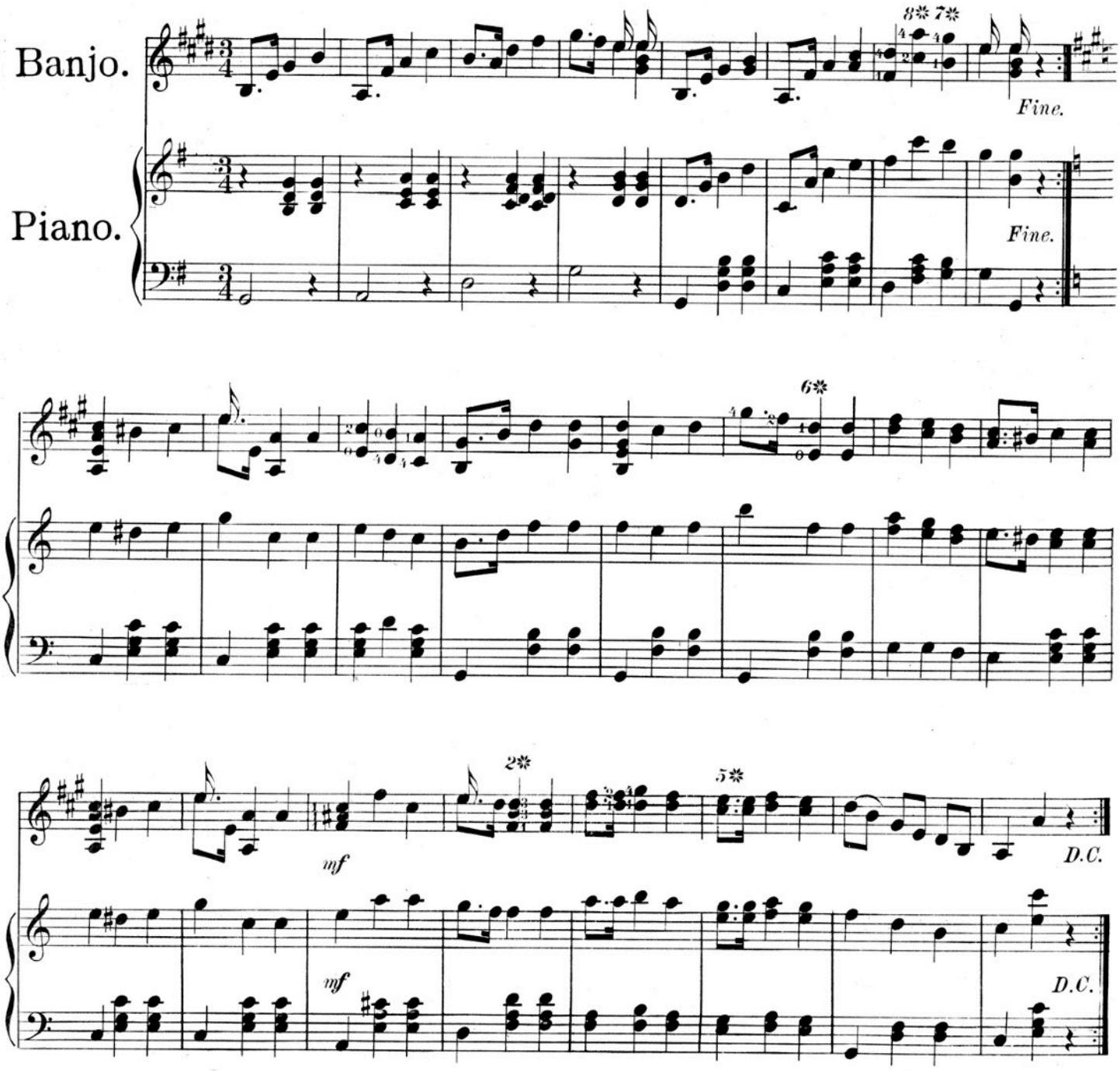


Aunt Susie's Walk in. 368 - 2.

No.369.
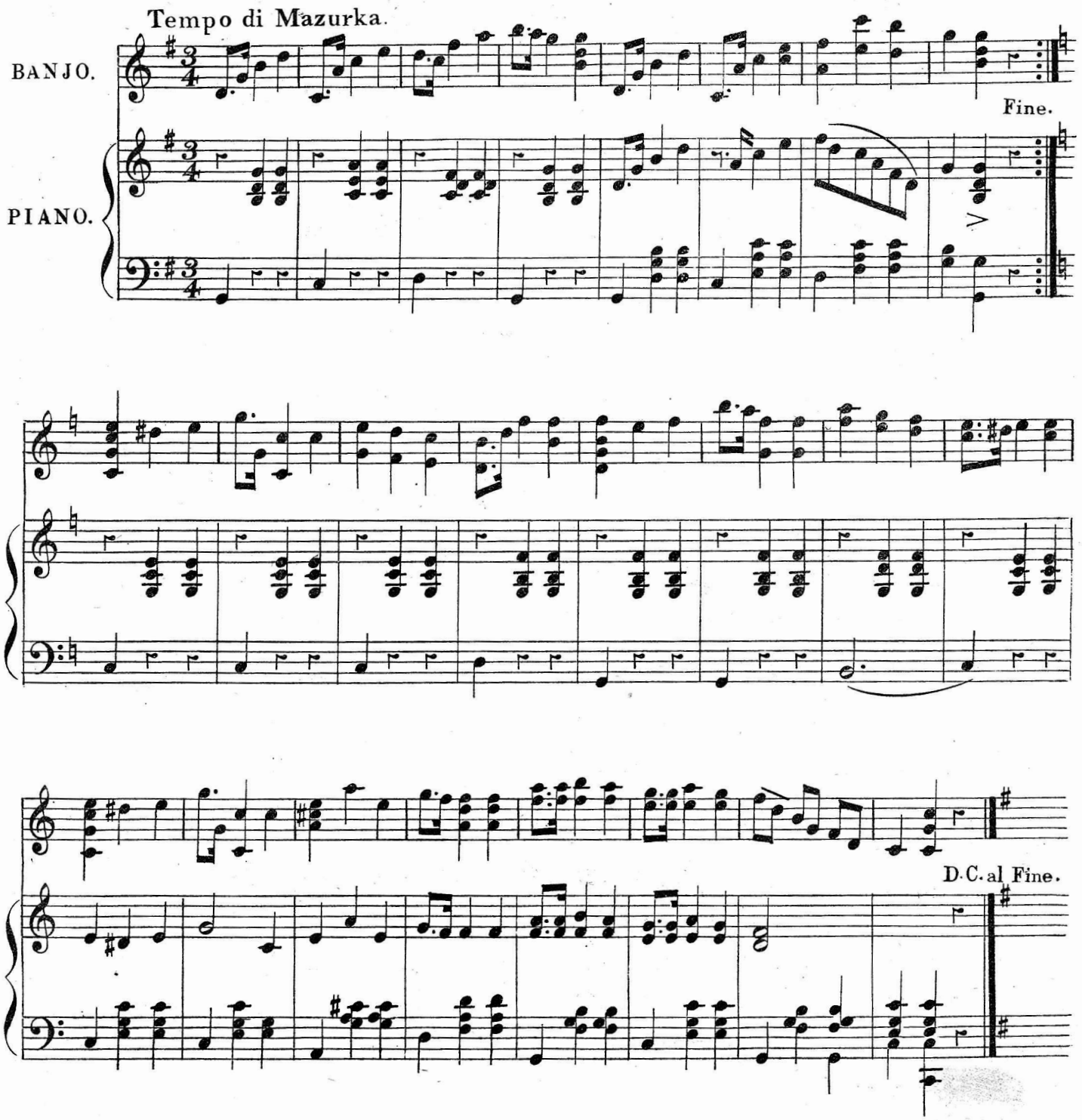
THE LITTLE DAISY MAZOURKA.

For the Banjo & Piano by BOLSOER GIBBS



THE LITTLE DAISY MAZURKA.

BOLSOVER GIBBS.
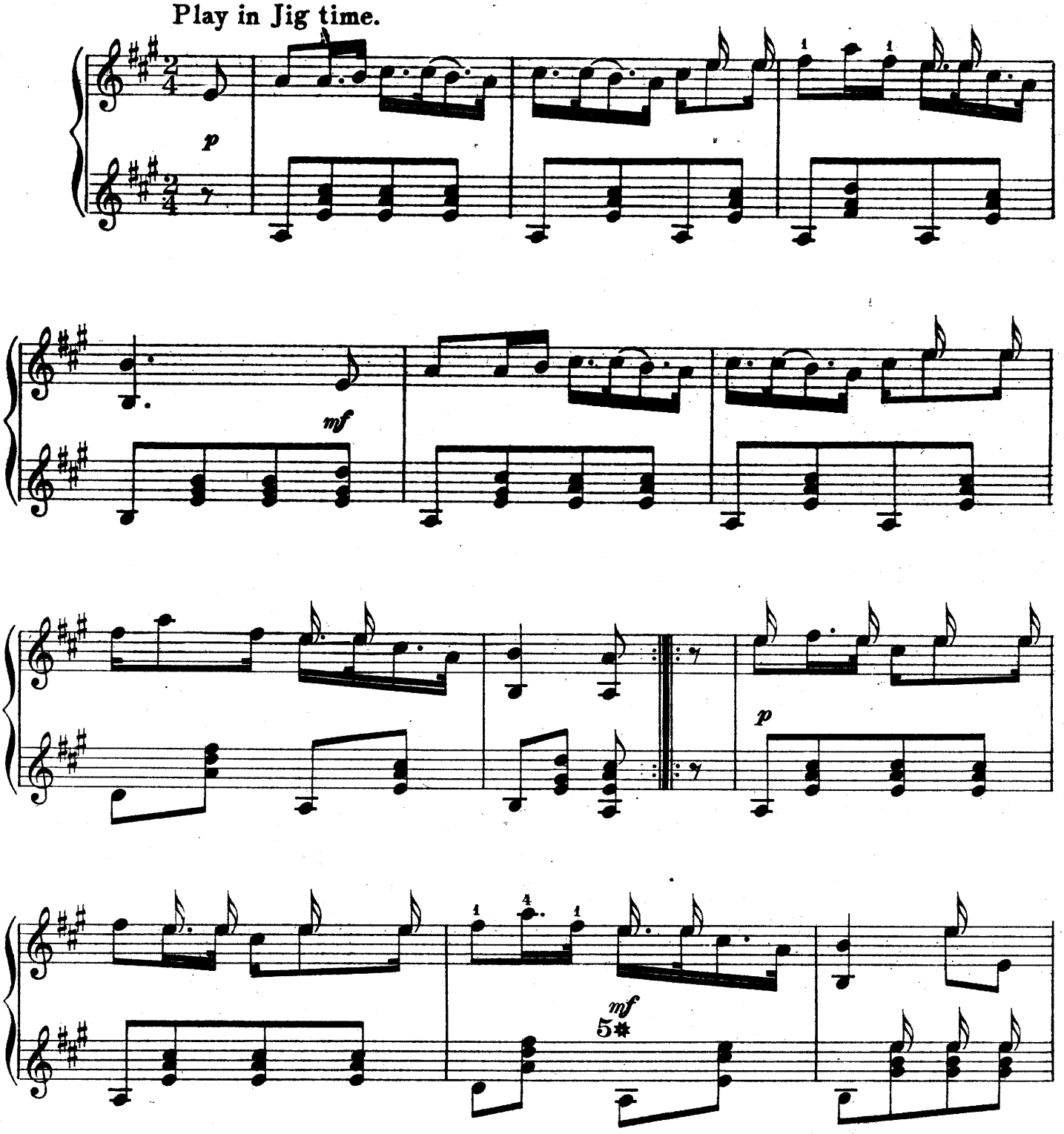


Ellis' Banjo Album No. 6.

FUNERAL MARCH
Of an old Jaw Bone.
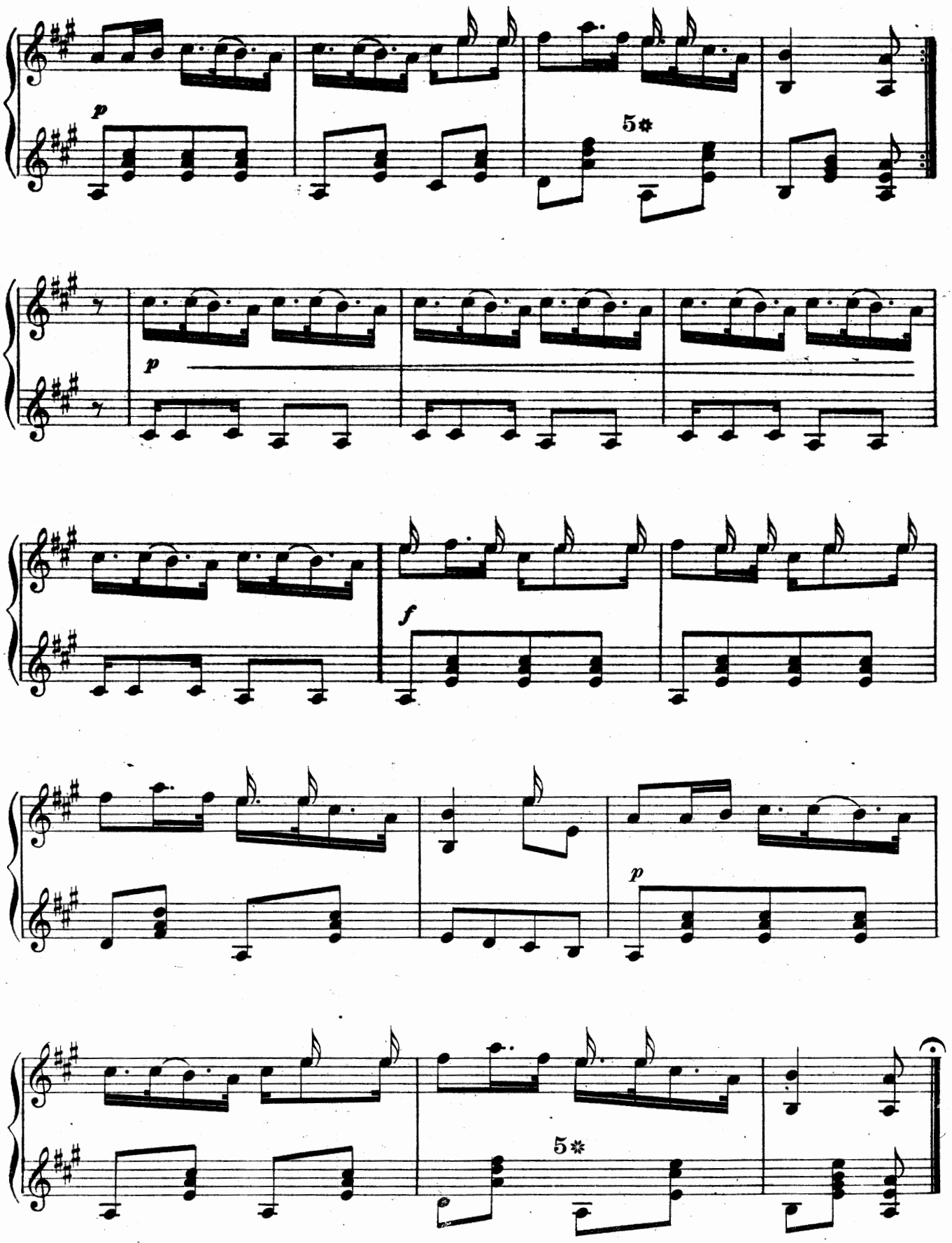
FOR TWO BANJOS.

No. 372.

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.
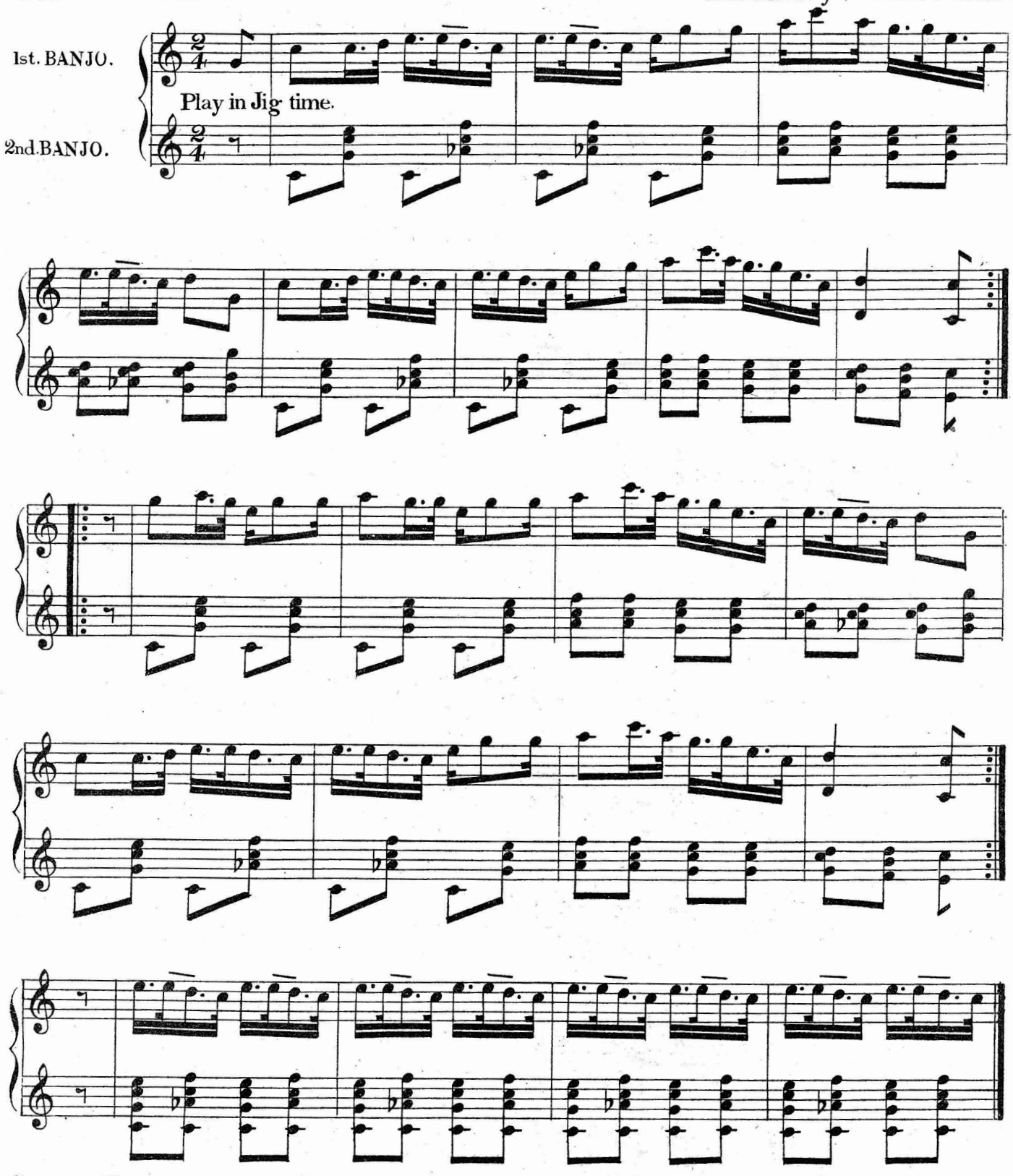


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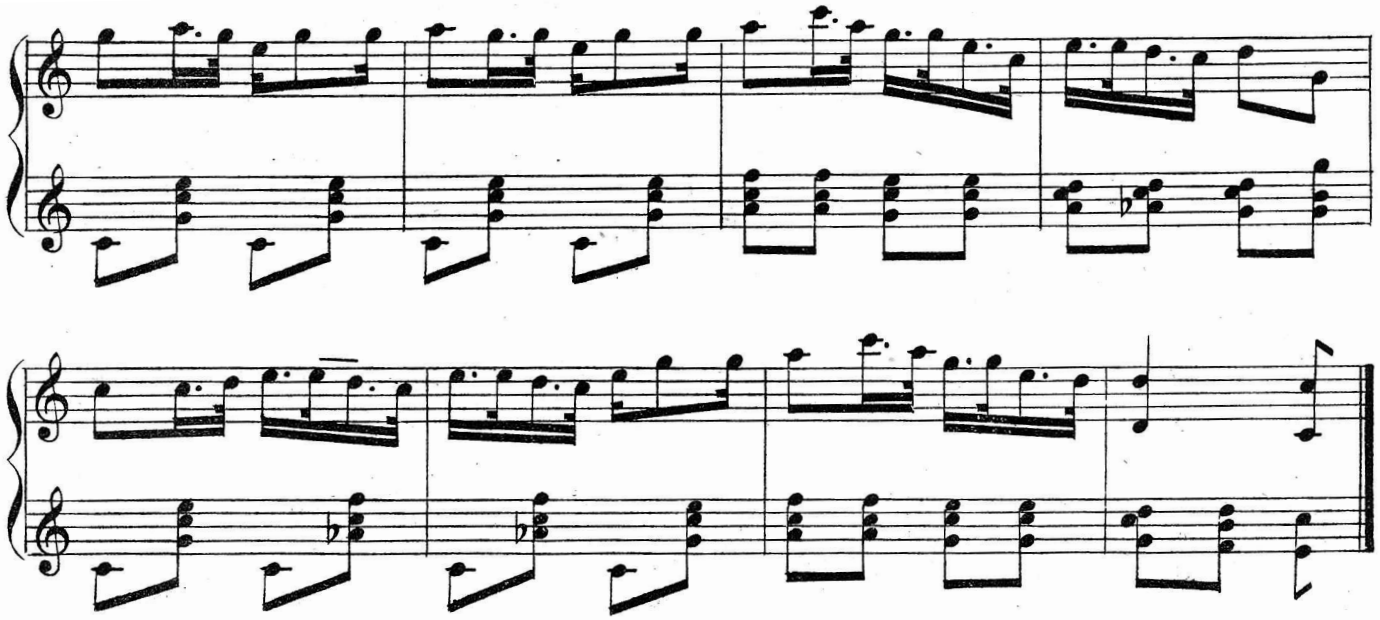
FUNERAL MARCH
OF AN
OLD JAW BONE.

BOLSOVER GIBBS.

Harmonised by HERBERT J. ELLIS.

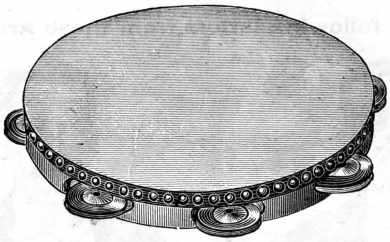


Ellis' Banjo Album No. 6.



Stewart's Narrow Professional Tambourines.

Price, $3.75.



S. S. Stewart's Improved Tambourines, 9 inch nickel plated rim, about 1¼ inches deep; maple wood lined; 6 sets German silver jingles; extra calf head.

I send one of the above Tambourines by regist'd mail, postage paid, on receipt of
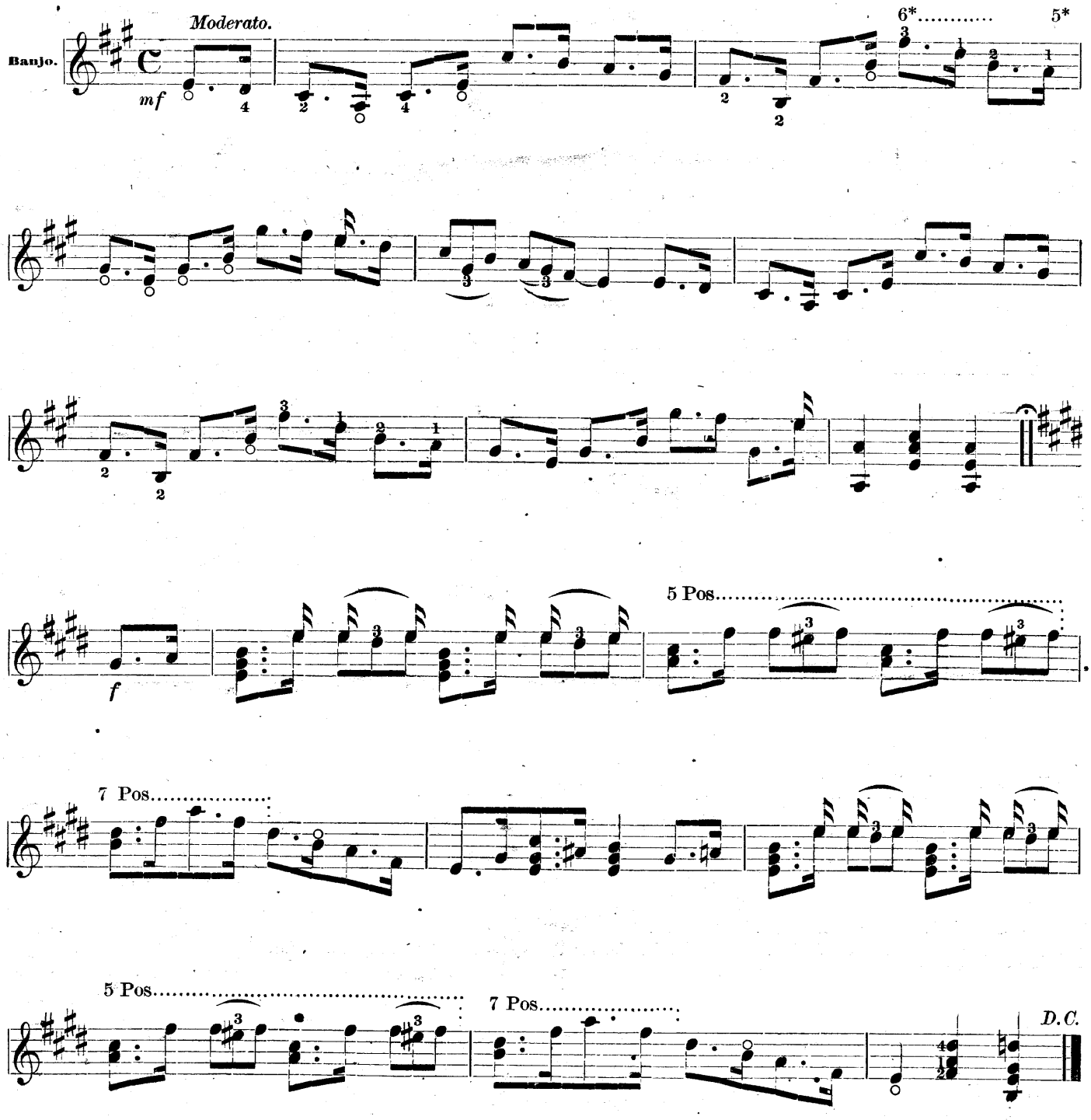
$4.00

Remit by P. O. money order or registered letter. No Tambourines send C. O. D.

PLUTO DANCE.

FOR THE BANJO.

BOLSOVER GIBBS.



Copyright, 1888, by S. S. STEWART.

To Miss Clarisia Fitzwater.



The March of the Phantoms

(PIANO. P. P. P. PIANOISSIMO)

· FOR THE ·

BANJO AND PIANO

BY

BOLSOVER GIBBS.

PHILADELPHIA, PENN.
PUBLISHED BY S.S.STEWART.
The Great Banjo Manufacturer.

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The Banjo possesses many peculiarly striking effects, but it is not every one ~~who~~ can strike.

THE MARCH OF THE PHANTOMS.

No. 404.

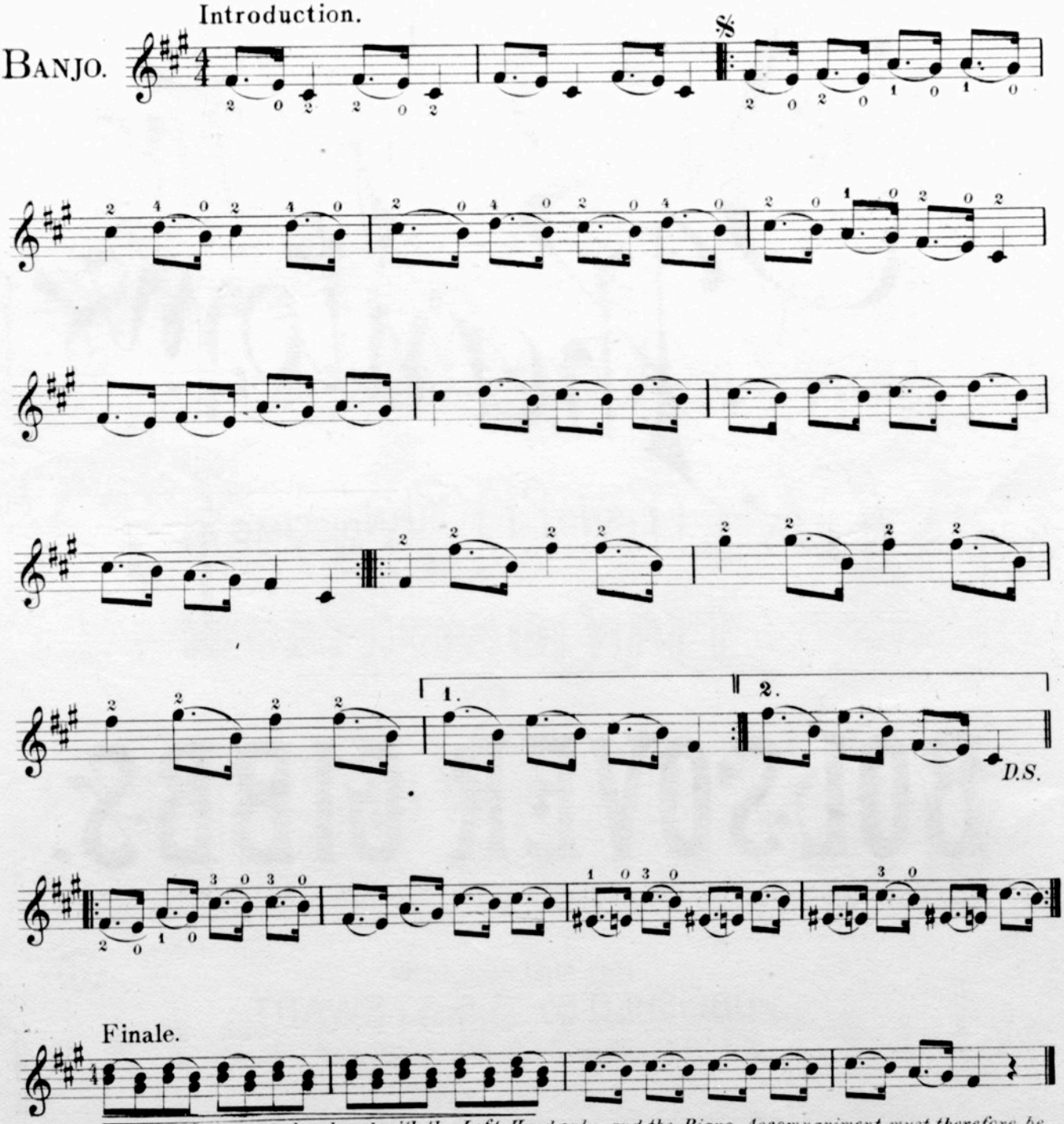
FOR BANJO AND PIANO.

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.

Tune Bass to "B."

Introduction.

BANJO.



This March is designed to be played with the Left Hand only, and the Piano Accompaniment must therefore be played "very piano" The composer grasps the Banjo firmly by the bar under the head with his right hand, and while thus holding the Banjo, plays the entire piece with his left hand.

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No. 404.

THE MARCH OF THE PHANTOMS.

Piano Accompt to Banjo Solo

Arr. by V. R. SECOR.

Introduction.

PIANO.

pp

To be played very soft throughout.

1. 2.

D.S.

Finale

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PHANTOM REEL.
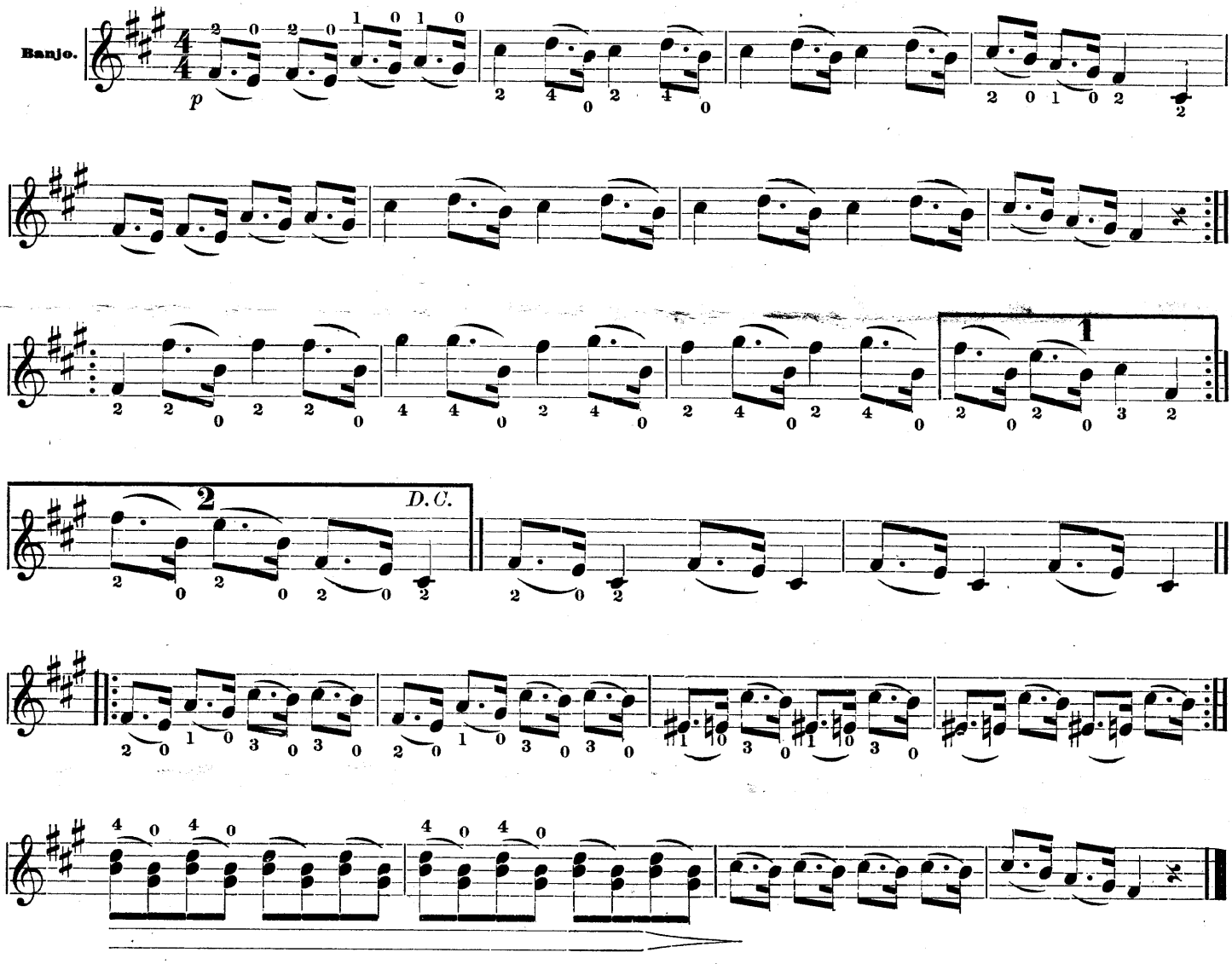
FOR THE BANJO.

BOLSOVER GIBBS.

It is said that on an occasion when Mr. Gibbs was suffering with a severe toothache he resorted to anæsthetics, and while under their influence passed into a dreamy state, wherein a phantom appeared, performing a wierd sonata upon the Banjo, using the left hand only.

The "Phantom Reel" is the result of this inspiration. It is played entirely with the left-hand, and upon a quiet evening produces a pleasing effect.

Some practice is necessary.



The above Reel is played by striking the strings with the indicated fingers of left-hand, thus causing the string to be brought down upon the indicated fret with a sort of slapping sound, (sometimes called the "hammer slur.) The following note, indicated by the slur, is produced by the end of the finger being raised from the string, releasing it from the fret.
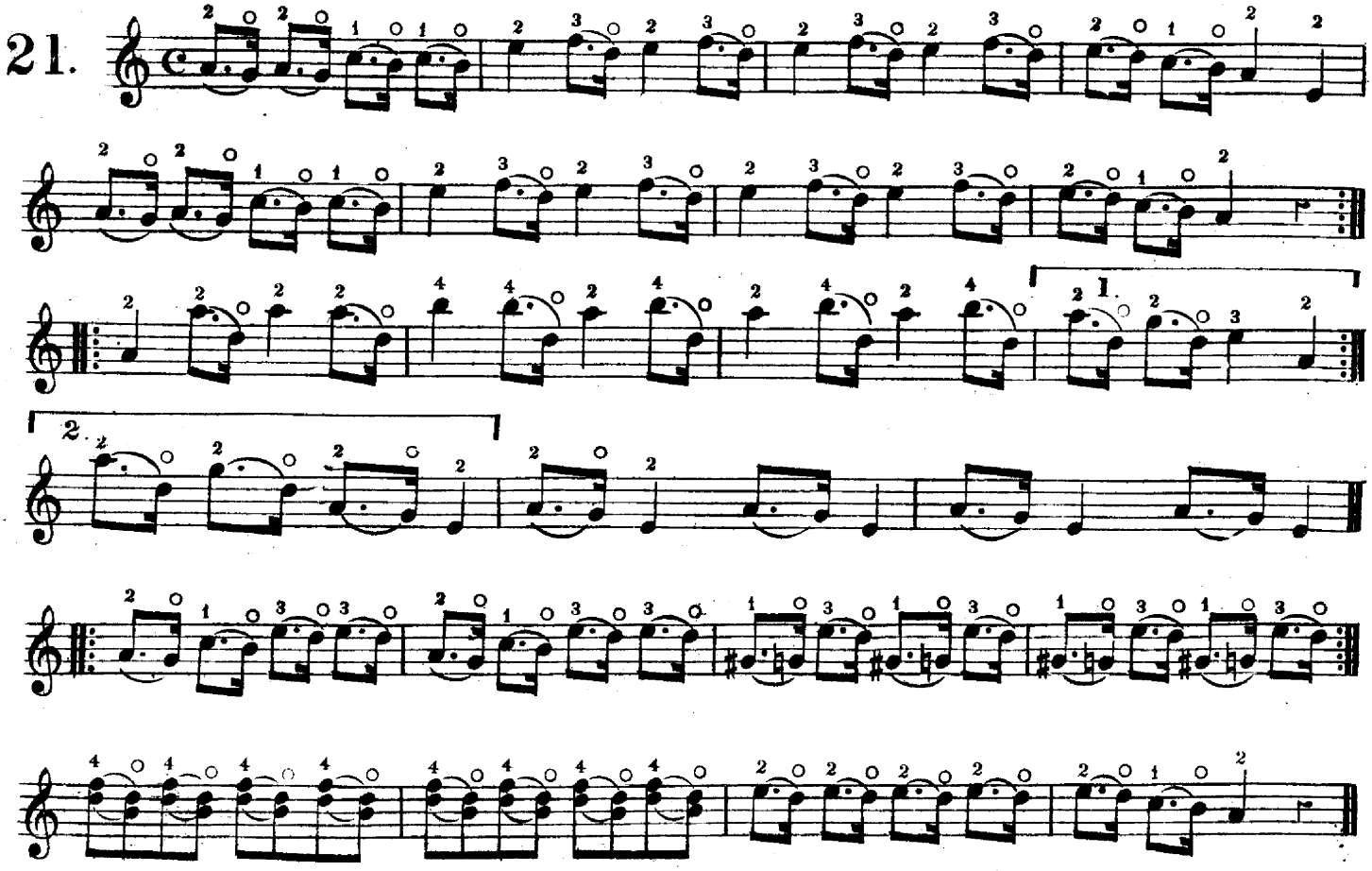
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PHANTOM REEL.

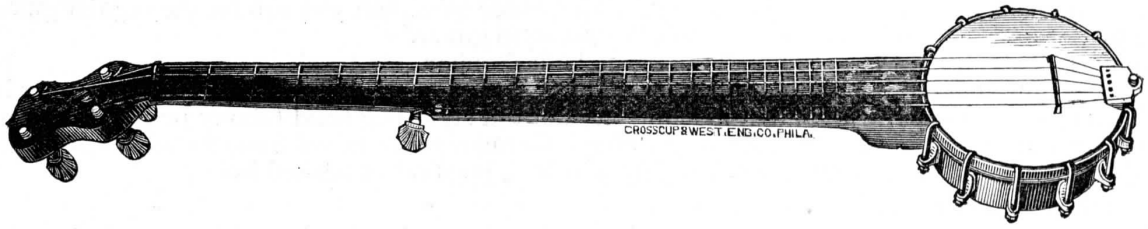
BOLSOVER GIBBS.

To be played entirely with the left hand. The first of two notes being produced by the tip of the finger coming down forcibly (sometimes called the "Hammer slur") and the second by the finger taken off, allowing the open string to vibrate.

21.
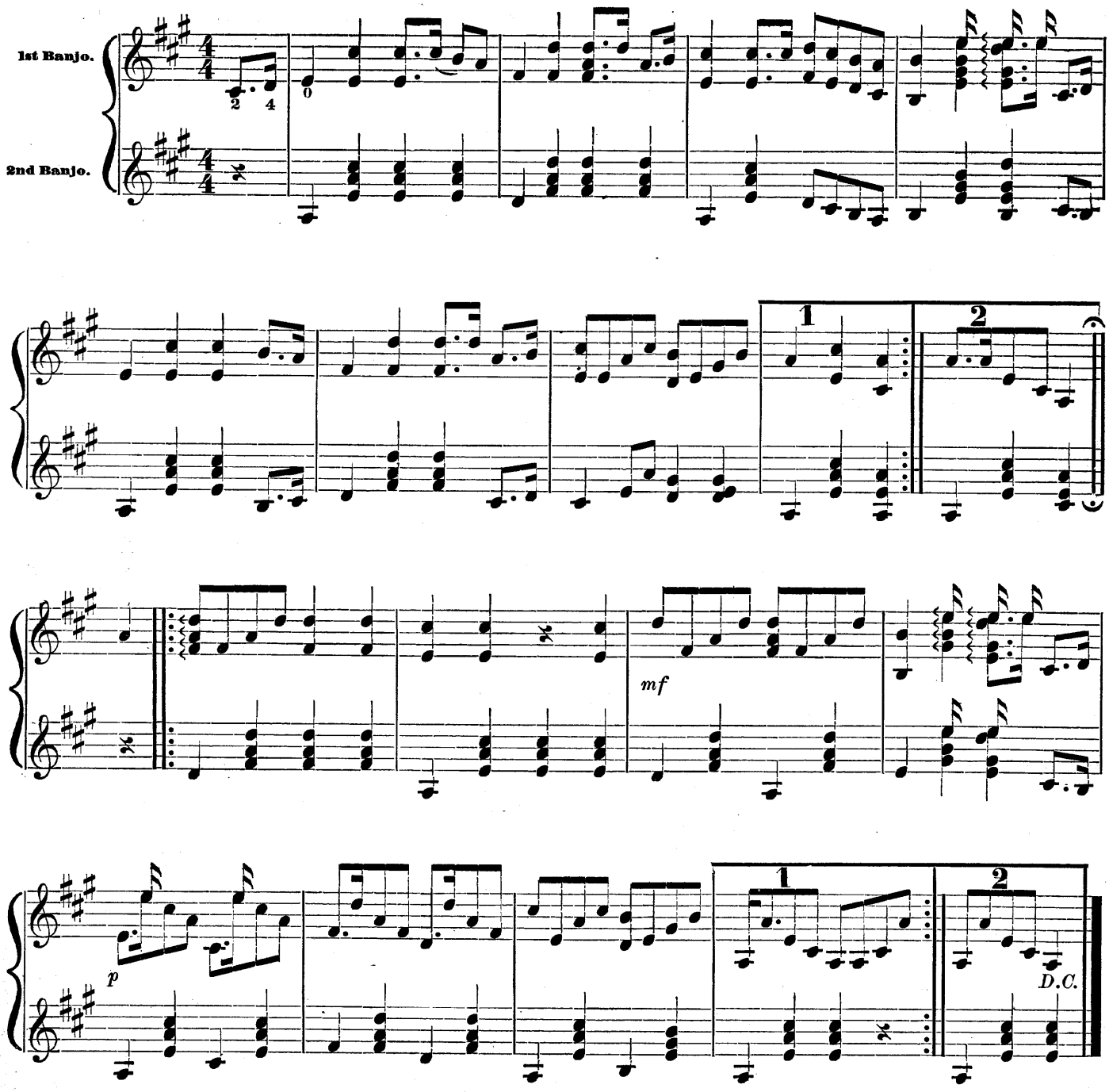


Turner's **99**.



THE FANTASTIC FAD T'RARUM SCHOTTISCHE.

FOR PICCOLO BANJO AND REGULATION BANJO.

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.



This Schottische is intended as a duet for Piccolo Banjo and Large Banjo, but may be used for two Banjos tuned alike, in the regular way, if preferred.
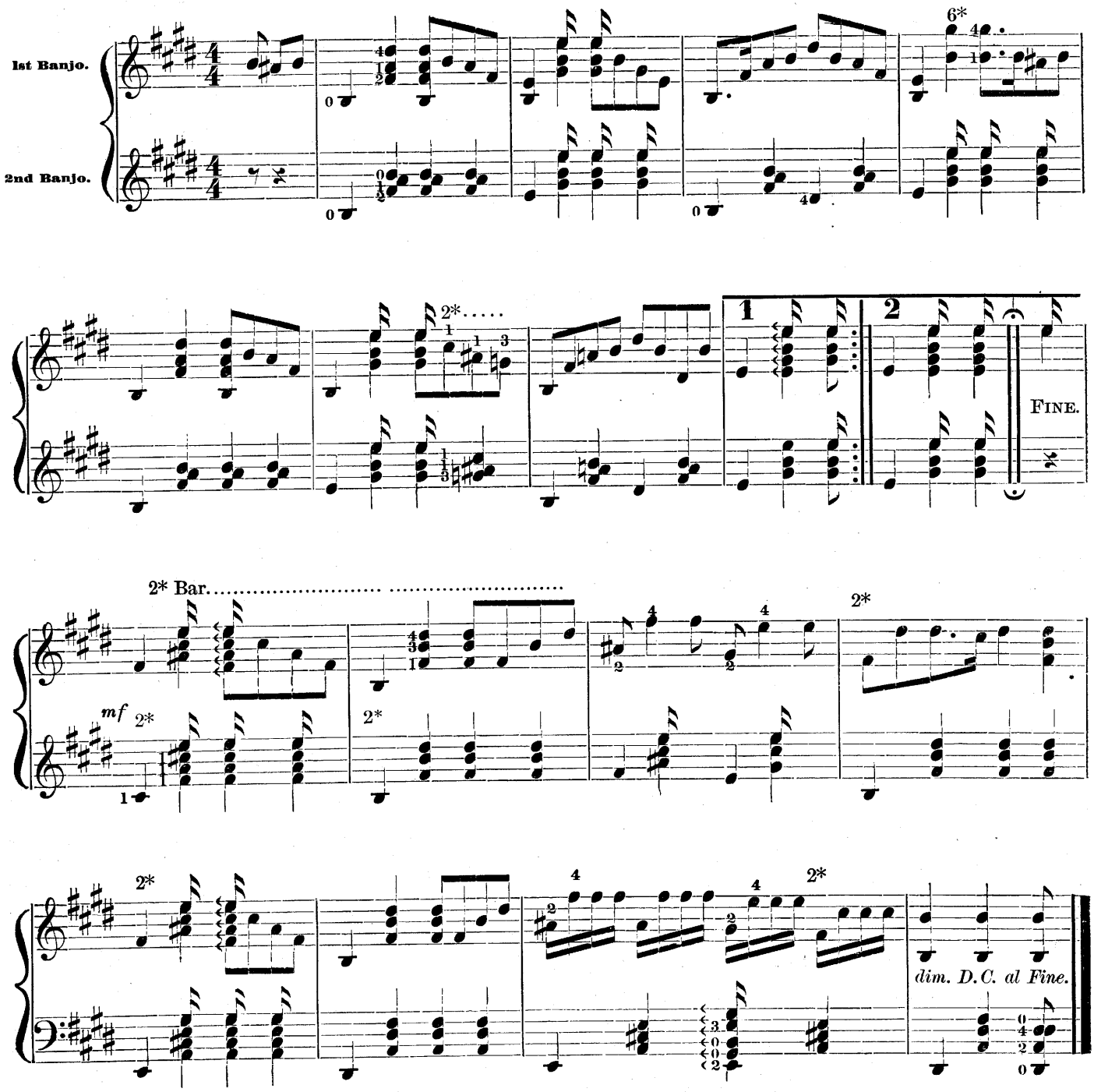
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HEMLOCK SCHOTTISCHE

FOR TWO BANJOS.

"Bass to B."

By BOLSOVER GIBBS.



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